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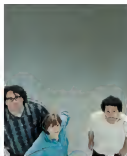
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Editor's Idea

Way back in June 1995, I found myself dispatched with a suitcase full of magazines to Barcelona, with instructions to flag them at this festival called Sonar. With no idea what to expect ("festive" having previously denoted a complete somewhere in the Quanticos), the approach to the event's entrance gate at the Centre of Contemporary Culture was as thrilling then as it remains today, ten years later. As your body adjusts to the midday Catalan heat, you push through the crowds on Las Ramblas, heading past a fine old Art Nouveau farmacia, and by the time you pass the entrance to the mysterious sounding street, Carrer del Doctor Dó, you are beginning to feel the thrud of powerful tube sound systems under your soles and in your soul. In '95, the area immediately outside the CCCB entrance was populated only by a few local kids looking a football and lobbing firecrackers. Nowadays you'll find yourself hounded by the legion of ashtray traders that go hand in hand with any large outdoor event: hair brushes, beer and water out of sea-filled canteens, tobacco and narcotic services, etc.

This month, Sonar hosts its tenth festival, an event which promises to be the biggest yet. Its growth is a remarkable story, aided in no small measure by the support of the local council, who have seen it as a

complement to the regeneration of Barcelona's inner city. Back in '95, the day events seemed pretty quiet: most of the outdoor courtyard, which nowadays is rammed with thousands of people, was at that time screened off with a discreet line of small conifers. You never had to queue either to imbibe or discharge fluids, and there was hardly an advertising logo in sight. You could peep over the shoulder at what some of the town's most artful and creative DJs were spinning on the potter's wheel, and watch from close up performances of alchemical intensity from the likes of Jorge Reyes, Biosphere, Scorn and Kerry Linkin.

It was a remarkable experience in other ways: meeting so many festivalgoers, label owners and musicians revealed, in a way that wasn't clear from sitting behind a desk, the accumulation of a network of musical interconnection and unity of purpose that was extending far and wide across the European mainland and beyond, enlightened and trans-generational. This was a Europe that was unbelievably far from the vision of Mitterrand's so often (and still, lamentably) propagandised by the popular UK press, one that aces English and American pop forms in silly accents. On the contrary, this generation was self-confident, attuned to technology, communications and distribution

systems and finding a common language in electronic's liberating channels of non-verbal energy.

It was inspirational, and continues to be after ten years in which the enterprise has mushroomed on a mammoth scale. There are those who complain about the size and the branding, and it's true that there remain contentious issues around, for example, the lack of remuneration for smaller artists who add underground credibility to the event, unlike the more bankable names.

But Sonar's absurdly small team, like the dedicated people who put together the ATP festivals, are not opportunists, but utopians forging an alternative global network in unusual spaces. Nevertheless they are produced in a real world of contingency. In that light, marshalling hundreds of musicians, each with their own demands and peculiarities, coping with the security and pleasure zones of almost 100,000 visitors, they have created an experience unlike any other, one that still feels like it's about connecting people and ideas rather than just trying to sell you stuff. These events contain plenty that intersects with The Wire's orbit, so we'll be turning out in force in Barcelona and Los Angeles once more this month.

ROB YOUNG

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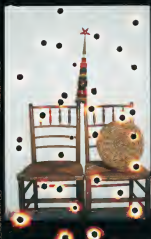
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Letters

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Repped in Backbite: The Cramps

Record collector

A quick comment on your Cramps Invisible Jukebox (*The Wire* 231). Good to see you covering the important groups from my era who have stuck to their guns, like The Cramps, The Fall, Wire, etc. However, surely they must have released more than six LPs? No mention of *Songs The Lord Taught Us* – a glaring omission for such a seminal record (actually it was referred to during the interview – Ed). Then there was *Psychicdelic Jungle*, *Off The Bone* (a compilation really), *Smell Of Female* (only a mini-LP), *A Date With Elvis*, the phenomenal *Rockin' in the Suckland-New Zealand* (on Vengeance and a semi-bootleg), *Stay Sick!*, *Look Mom No Head!*, the surprisingly excellent *Flamejob*, the very disappointing *Big Beat From Badsville* and now *Friends...* That makes eight studio albums plus the mini-LPs, compilations, live issues, etc. Come on, give them some credit for not being as stolid as a mutant zombie.

Andy Duncan Brecon, UK

The statement in question, that *The Cramps* had only released six albums, was made due to a subbing error. Apologies to the writer, Richard Henderson – Ed

Sine writer

Let me thank you for Den Worburton's beautiful review of Asmus Tietjens (*Soundcheck*, *The Wire* 231). It's about time *The Wire* dealt with the work of this German composer, who has developed an uncompromising musical language that is totally his own. One small note: the confusion only refers to the narrative/white noise manipulations as released on Ritornel. Tietjens has expanded the studies and a fourth disc (entitled *Dots-Mongo*) is due some time on the Swiss label Domini. Secondly, let me state that *Auf Abwegen* maintains the official Asmus Tietjens Web page, which can be found at www.tietjens.de. Till Knies Cologne, Germany

See the interview with Tietjens on page 12 of this month's issue – Ed

The Irish question

For the record, the Belfast Songs book and CD project (*Punt Run*, *The Wire* 231) was not part of the city's 'failed' 'city of culture' bid. Being funded by the Arts

Council of Northern Ireland or the Belfast City Council does not mean you are "trading on the symbolic capital of Belfast", as even a cursory glance at some of the city's funded artistic output would demonstrate. Ben Watson might have done well to read *Belfast Songs* a little more carefully. It is not true that "all the writing pitches genuine experience of the city versus 'media cliché'". The contributors were not producing "art manifestos". Chris Magee did not fail "to expose the liberal literary life" of Crass (Magee: "They were mocked as middle class rebels playing at being revolutionaries"). The word "Belfast" was not cut from 20 songs. That is not CD flutter, it is a banjo. No promo lagers were necked at the launch, etc. etc.

But so much for accuracy. Ben Watson is obviously confused by the project of writing about Belfast. The authors are not "determinedly anti-sectarian", they find not being sectarian very easy. None of the contributors are guilty of "coddly you don't live here so you don't know 'solipsism'" (not least because they don't all live here, and in some cases never have). Mr Watson must demonstrate his learning: "the prompts of post-structuralism... founders on the distinctly unsymbolic nature of the Troubles". The Troubles unsymbolic nature of the Troubles, bonfires, funerals, hunger strikes, murals, etc. Watson claims that neglect of the key fact that "Ireland was Britain's first colony" (what?) and the lack of "analysis of imperialist history" leads contributors to "the argument used by whites to defend apartheid South Africa".

Innocence and staid, is that enough? No, sadly not: try patronising. Paul Muldoon "is nearly, but not quite, convincing" and finally "one dreams that Belfast Songs could provoke a scrofulous, cassette and photocopy pastiche put together by canny locals". Oh yes, the canny local – that would be him in the pub with a flat cap and a 'quare' expression, I expect.

Hilarious, but perhaps not suitable for a serious magazine.

Richard West, Stephen Hackett (Factotum) Belfast, UK

Your re-readings of my text are so legion I can only refer readers back to my original review, and chuckle (or as that not allowed in "serious" magazines?) – BW

Old Bailey

Keith Coyne's provocative letter (*Letters*, *The Wire* 231) will no doubt prompt a flood of replies. For what

it's worth, here's my contribution. I'd say Derek Bailey has certainly driven up a commercial *cul de sac*, but an artistic one? Bailey, now well into his seventies we shouldn't forget, has over the last 20 odd years been busily testing his "fossilised", "desiccated" and "sterile" art in a diverse array of musical settings. Some have worked, some haven't. But in any case these do not seem to me to be the actions of a complacent artist.

And *The Wire* "increasingly doctrinaire"? It continues to help me keep my mind open, but then again I read it in the context of a range of different media and make my own mind up. I don't think you have to take everything that appears in the magazine as sacrosanct, and I'm sure the staff would be disappointed if you did.

Steve Walsh via email

Thanks for printing Keith Coyne's letter re: Derek Bailey. Most refreshing to hear the sacred Eynore of Improv knocked off his and pedestal (Ben Watson probably we-d in his SWP well-out bottoms), and I look forward to further letters from Keith about AMM, Evan Parker and the rest.

Thanks also for the article on Matthew Herbert which was good for a few laughs. If he's really an earnest Chomskyite and not a bandwagon-jumping all-chancer, then I'm Richard Branson, the well known anti-capitalist Prognophy.

Simon Fay via email

A not-so special relationship

John Tibury (*Letters*, *The Wire* 231) states that he has "no one to blame but [himself]" for the way that the piece about him in *The Wire* 230 turned out. However, the real question for Tibury is not whether he should have made his wishes clearer over the content of the piece, but why he thinks that an article concentrating on his stance in relation to the USA would have been appropriate in the first place. One of the reasons why I enjoy reading *The Wire* is that it focuses on music as sound, an approach that acknowledges social context but refuses extramusical agendas. A piece centring on Tibury's decision not to go to the USA, at the expense of discussing his recent musical activity, would have been inappropriate and, worst of all, boring.

Richard Ross Jones Brighton, UK



CHATHAM

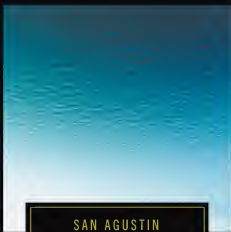
AN ANGEL MOVES TOO FAST TO SEE

SELECTED WORKS 1971-1989

At first glance, New York-born composer Rhys Chatham might have seemed unlikely to alter the DNA of rock. A classically trained musician, Chatham was piano tuner to Glenn Gould and La Monte Young, student of Young and Morton Subotnick, protégé of Tony Conrad, and in 1971, while still in his teens, founder of the highly influential experimental music program at the Kitchen in lower Manhattan. Nevertheless, it was Rhys Chatham who first applied multiple electric guitars to the extended-duration, overtone-drenched minimalism of the 1960s. This amalgamation — of the intellectual experimentalism and textural sophistication of the avant-garde with the rhythmic brashness and visceral punch of punk rock — produced a raucous, ecstatic new type of urban music that energized the downtown New York scene of the late 1970s and early 1980s, a music whose influence can be heard in the subsequent work of the many luminaries who participated in Chatham's ensembles, including Glenn Branca and members of Sonic Youth, Mars, Band of Susans and Swans.

A comprehensive 3-disc retrospective, *An Angel Moves Too Fast to See* includes all of Chatham's major "minimal" pieces, ranging from the thunderous "Two Gongs" (1971) and the No-Wave tumult of "Guitar Trio" (1977) to the brass-based "Messacre on MacDougal Street" (1982) and the epic, previously unreleased "An Angel Moves Too Fast to See" (1988), scored for an orchestra of 100 electric guitars. The accompanying 140-page book features dozens of never-before-published photos plus essays by Chatham, Tony Conrad and Lee Ranaldo and artwork by famed visual artist Robert Longo. Together they present a portrait of a city and a milieu where, for a moment, the raw, the sophisticated, the meditative and the danceable merged.

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SAN AGUSTIN

THE EXPANDING SEA

Georgia natives San Agustín (David Baniel, guitar; Andrew Burnes, guitar; Bryan Fielder, drums) have performed with a multitude of notables from the improvised community, including Ken Vandermark, Thurston Moore, Leron Maczancane and others, but this 3xCD boxed set is the first truly representative document of their live presence. Mounting moments of introspection are enveloped in clouds of bluesy guitar notes, then swept away by great electric gales; drones rumble and shimmer in the aftermath. *The Expanding Sea* is a tremendous work by an ensemble that is creating a genre-defying yet archetypically American music.

"[San Agustín] works in suspended slow-motion patterns that revolve around simple resonating phrases, like a rock trio stripped of all content — just leaving a bare skeleton of tone traces behind. The beauty is in its strict restraint; unlike many improvising trios, the group never heads off into chaos, with every piece a banded and trimmed exercise in controlled feedback and subtle cymbal chimes. Bridging post-rock and avant-garde on one axis, and on the other retaining a strict adherence to rock tradition, the feel is of a familiar austerity that calls to mind the chilling moments of Sonic Youth's first album."

—ALL MUSIC GUIDE

"Trio from Georgia that purvey a floating ethereal improvised gauzy veil of sound. Jazzy drumming (in the best sense) and criss-crossing picked guitar parts by bards meditative and discursive, these guys have a great take on group dynamics and are justly lauded...Entrancing."

—CORPUS HERMETICUM

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—LORNE MACZANCANE Critics

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Letters

Design for living

I really enjoyed the Cross Platform interview with Intro's Adrien Shoughnessy (The Wire 231). I realise now why I love digipack design over bog standard plastic cases. It's the going back to being 14/15 and poring over vinyl sleeves and wondering what the album will sound like. The fantastic mystery of the whole thing coupled with rushing back to your bedroom to listen and dissect slownotes and design. As Shoughnessy points out, anyone who has a PC is a graphic designer now. In the same way, anyone who owns a PC is also a musician. As a graphic designer in the real world and bedroom musician in the other world (whatever that is), I find the process difficult: you take a snapshot of music/photography stretch it, reverse it or warp it into something new.

A lot of Intro's work looks to have this 'hand touched' feel in the rather odd, digital, perfect world we live in. It's very easy today to go down a path that is the picture, snap on some text and away we go. Long live smudges, mistakes, scratches and human feel. I like Intro's work a lot.

Jon Black via email

Beauty stab

The Wire 231: First time this reader of eight years has had to close the magazine while reading it on public transportation due to the overwhelming beauty of the graphic design work. Actually stunned my mind upon reaching the double page spread that opened the Mega article! Informed journalism, music, art, culture and now design on a par with your finest content in these fields... ExhortsForas... it does have a lovely ring to it ...

Jefferson W Petrey Seattle, USA

Corra tuhr

I'm compelled to write concerning a statement in David Krasnow's Tom Corra retrospective (The Wire 230). The author states that Tom and I started working together when I was 'fresh out of music school'. Don't know where Krasnow got that idea, but I never attended music school. I took a handful of lessons with Milford Graves, a couple with Andrew Cyrille and Barry Altschul, and did an extended stay in Nigeria learning some drumming and lots else from the great Kromuadi Luvuvhu and his traditional drumming group, but music school? Nope!

Otherwise, I feel that the wrong impression might have been imparted by Krasnow's statement: "[Tom] played a few shows with Sam Bennett." In fact Third Person, over the course of five years or so, probably clocked close to 80 live performances in tours of Europe, Japan and the US, and at home in New York City, many of those featuring saxophonist Umeko Kurotsuki, who settled in as the permanent 'band person' during the last couple of years of the group's existence.

One other point: it might well have been an editorial decision rather than the author's intention, but it seems to me that offering your readership only one and two-thirds pages of text on the life's work of Tom Corra was a bit stingy, especially when one considers that this was the first feature on Tom to appear in the pages of The Wire, and will almost certainly be the last.

Sam Bennett Tokyo, Japan

Put the funk back in it

In his review of Fred Wesley's autobiography (Print Run, The Wire 230), Ben Watson hits the nail on the head. As a Rubberfunk and funkster myself, I can only confirm that Wesley's horn arrangements on the George Clinton-produced sides from the mid-70s onwards are a good part of the funk (inherent to those records). Working an improbable yet terribly efficient alchemy with other members of those groups, Wesley brought some welcome tightness to an otherwise frantic whole. Similarly, any James Brown track involving 'Friendly Fred' is an awe-inspiring experience in group sound. I therefore find it hard on Wesley's part to date the Godfather and Motherfunk so much. All the records he put out under his own name since the late 80s have been lame, to say the least, apart from the odd good track here and there. Undoubtedly, Fred Wesley is one of my heroes, his contribution to the funk genre is vital, but he lacks the sheer madness of JB or the adventurous genius of Dr Funkenstein. To my ears, his jazz playing has not much to recommend it. Wesley should stick to the funk.

My gentle wrath extends to other Old School funksters. While Mongo Parker and Bootsy have taken a more commercial route with a certain degree of success, George Clinton has not made a decent record in quite some time now. The latest three JB albums are no less than embarrassing, with no real horns or drums. JB recently said that he missed the time of his great horn players. When I last saw him on the scene in Toulouse six months ago, he ordered one of the saxophone players, "Blow like Maceo!" A telling fact if there ever was one. S'cause me for that lengthy bout of funky nostalgia. Glad to see you ain't forgetting the funk, though. Good Good!

David Cristol Toulouse, France

Vestigial organ

In your cover story on Faust (The Wire 229), David Keenan wrote, "The Velvet connection became much more explicit after Nettlebeck flashed on the idea of setting up a collaboration between New York minimalist and La Monte Young/early Velvetvets associate Tony Conrad and the Faust rhythm section of Diermaier and Pomeroy, augmented by Soans and a still uncredited Immler on organ. The record was eventually released as Outside The Dream Syndicate." I owe it to the late Rudolf Soans to point out to you myself that the credits on Outside The Dream Syndicate are correct

and complete. All organ parts on Outside are played solely by Rudolf Soans.

Uwe Nettlebeck Maransin, France

Only connect

Thanks very much for the illuminating profile/cbit of Daphne Gram (The Wire 229). It was great to read about another female originator of electronic/electroacoustic music. Something about the name rang a vague bell, but it wasn't 'til the other day I realised why: it's a New Zealand connection. The 'father' of electronic music in NZ was the late Douglas Lilburn. He established the first Southern Hemisphere EMS at Victoria University in Wellington in 1966. Daphne was crucial to this.

In 1963 Lilburn was on a study tour, and arrived in the UK after a period in Toronto, where he had realised how little he really knew about what he wanted to do. He found how people in London of the major universities in the UK able or willing to help him, until he encountered Daphne and was invited to spend some time in her couthouse. It was after this period of hands-on work and discussion that he felt personally enabled to make a return visit to Toronto to study with Myron Schoeffel, who then taught him enough to enable the establishment of the VUWEMS in Wellington.

Most of this information is contained in the booklet accompanying the 1974 KwiPacific Records box set New Zealand Electronic Music, but the identity of Daphne Gram was a mystery until I read your article. So thanks to The Wire for illuminating this crucial episode in New Zealand musical history, and thanks to Daphne for having the unselfishness to give a hand to an enquiring Antpodian. We all have reason to be grateful.

Bruce Russell Lyttelton, New Zealand

Corrections

Issue 231 In the Mega feature, the photo of the Mega crew in 1995 did not feature Andreas Propper, but Bernhard, their former landlord. The photo of Sarah Peebles and Niran Perera on page 14 was taken by Daniel Peebles. In Soundcheck, the photo of Nurse Dr. Wound was taken by Andrea Tibot, and Aesma Tatchers' Gamma-Megase was mistakenly called Beta-Megase. In Cross Platform, the review of La Monte Young & Marian Zazezels's Well-Tuned Piano In The Ragtime Lights DVD stated that the material was a release of the Gramavision box set recorded on 25 October 1981 and released in 1987. In fact, it documents a totally different performance recorded on 10 May 1987. In the Directory, the details for the Hwy label were incorrect. The correct URL is: www.hwyinfo.com.

Issue 230 In Soundcheck some of the song titles in the review of Wire's Send were written out incorrectly. The correct titles are: 'Mr Mark's Table' and 'You Can't Leave Now'. □

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MATT ELLIOTT

The Mess We Made

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"A small avalanche of recorded evidence that music is as fresh as ever"

The Independent

"For those times when rain hurls itself at your windows, and the wind whispers 'hush your doors' www.dosomethingpretty.com"

"Ghostly, aquatic ambience that doubles as a timely lament for these lost, crazy times" 4/5 Times Play

"A beguiling mix of krautrockian electronics, Tom Waits-style alludey and yolk, distorted folk and choral pieces" 4/5 Bang

"A schizophrenic, free-falling vision of chaos" 4/5 DJ

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Wed 28 May CARDIFF The Barfly

Thu 29 May BRISTOL Cafe

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(SMOG)

Supper

(Smog) is back and "Supper" is ready

"An album of warm beauty" 4/5 Bang

"Supper displays a real empathy that reveals in the interconnectedness of life, it's another stage in (his) great escape" 4/5 Mojo

"Callahan classics, dissecting love and lust with a shard of diamond from a broken engagement ring" The Observer

"Supper is one of (Smog)'s warmest, most lived in records" 4/5 The Independent

"Few, if any, songwriters can equal him right now" The Daily Telegraph

"Manna from heaven!" The Guardian



The
Foundation

www.dosomethingpretty.com

Bitstream

News and more from under the radar.
Compiled by The Trawler

One sick widow: Lydia Lunch



'High priestess of soul', jazz singer, pianist and activist **Nina Simone** died of natural causes aged 70 on 21 April. Born Eunice Waymon in North Carolina in 1933, she first came to notice at the tail end of the 50s with "My Baby Just Cares For Me" and her version of "I Loves You Porgy". With "Mississippi Goddam" (1963) she became one of the first African-American artists to take a prominent stand on racial issues and she remained an unequivocal campaigner for civil rights for the rest of her life. For more on her life and career, see Ian Penman's appreciation on page 28 >> Results just in from this year's **Prix Ars Electronica**: The Golden Nosa went to Cosmos aka Am Yoshioka and Seichiro M (Japan), while Maia Ratkje (Norway) and Hecker (Australia) received distinctions. More details at www.aec.at/ >> **Summer Crane**, guitarist and vocalist for No Wave pioneers Mars, died of lymphoma on 15 April at St Vincent's Hospital in New York. Crane was first heard fronting Mars on the infamous 1979 *No New York* compilation and later on the Mars EP. Gathering together a bunch of Downtown habitués, Crane recorded John Gavant's, a No Wave version of Mozart's Don Giovanni, before concentrating on painting and art criticism. He is survived by his wife Sue >> The Association of British Jazz Musicians is running a campaign against the **Licensing Bill** which is currently in committee in the House of Commons. The bill would do away with the "two in a bar rule", which allows groups of up to two members to perform on licensed premises without a public entertainment licence. The

bill is being seen as a threat to the vitality of Britain's live music scene. Go to www.abjm.org.uk for more information >> Start camping out now: The Merce Cunningham Dance Company has commissioned **Radiohead** and **Sigur Rós** to create music for *Split Sides*, which will be premiered at New York's Brooklyn Academy of Music on 14 October. For the first night only, each group will perform their own 20 minute compositions live on stage with the dancers >> The future is Not What It Used To Be, Mika Taanila's film about the Finnish electronic music visionary **Erkki Kurenniemi** (see Cross Platform, The Wire 225), will be screened as part of the opening events for the 50th Venice Biennale this month. After the last screening there will be a special tribute concert, featuring Parsons, Carl Michael von Hausseloff and Erkki Kurenniemi himself. A DVD entitled *The Dawn Of DMX* contains the documentary, plus Kurenniemi's various short films and animations and concert footage from the early 70s >> So you can't boatmix to save your life, but still want to control the vibes at a nightclub? First not, Dutch "aroma jockey" 0007 has just developed the career path for you. As the world's first aroma jockey, 0007 uses hotplates and charcoal plates as his turntables as he mixes a sound-synchronised blend of 160 scents. If you want to perfect that seamless blend of stonax and sandalwood, point your browser to www.civilrevolution.com/odo7 >> Bret Wood's **Hel's Highway**, a film about American highway safety films and the men who made them, is currently making the

rounds of America's art house circuit. The film features scenes from 20 vintage drivers' education films as well as music chosen and made by Wire contributor Alan Light >> Oh (English) rose, thou art sick! based on several years worth of exclusive interviews and access to personal archives, The Wire's David Keenan has written a book about Nurse With Wound, Coil and Current 93. Called **England's Hidden Reverse**, the book is published by SAF. A launch party with readings by Keenan will take place on at Glasgow's Manorial Music (5 June, 7:30pm, www.manorialmusic.com) >> Following EM's purchase of Mute, **Daniel Miller** has set up his own independent label, Credible Sex Units. His first signing is analogue pop outfit Vo Twenty who recently supported Enslure on tour >> **Lydia Lunch** has a new project, *W/ing Victim*, her latest harbinger of sonic schizophrenia. The group's four piece line-up includes Nellie Cline, Alga Kays, Norman Westerberg and Vinnie Signorelli (the latter three former players with Fortress and Swans), as well as Spanish videomakers Josep Jordans and Marc Viaplana >> **Hermann Nitsch** has gone one better than Merzbow by creating a 51 disc box set, *Die Musik 6 Tage-Spekt 51 CD-R Box*. The edition of 40 copies is signed, numbered and hand-made from black linen, and along with the CD-Rs contains an original drawing by Nitsch, the full documentation from the six day Aktion from 1998 over three books, and a poster. A snip at \$1150. For more information, go to www.forcedexposure.com. □

Death Row

How would Holger Czukay spend his last day on Earth?

You are allowed...

Three records

Sid Vicious "I Did It My Way"
Karlheinz Stockhausen *Hymnen*
Franz Schubert *Death And The Maiden*

One film

Metropolis by Fritz Lang

One book

Alice in Wonderland by Lewis Carroll

Three visitors

WC Fields, the Pope, Peter Usznov

Last meal

Smashed carrots with mashed apples and squeezed oranges plus rapad lemons, poelad pressed lears with sugar and a tiny bit of zywniak (strong poison)
Hmmm... delicious!

Final message for the world

Better rich and healthy than poor and sick

Music for the funeral


The BBC signal for Germany during World War Two □

Holger Czukay & U-She's *The New Millennium* is out now on Dignose



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12 may 2003

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Rock 'n' roll ball of flame.
By Marc Masters

"We're always trying to do something other than what we came up with, so in that sense our sound hasn't ever come together," says Sightings bassist Richard Hoffman, asked to pinpoint when the Brooklyn trio's maximal, crushing attack first coagulated. "It's the nature of trying to have your own sound; you don't know exactly what you are after because you haven't heard it before."

Hoffman's aim may appear high, but after only three albums, Sightings are almost there. Their pounding distortion reveals a distinctive line of antecedents, including the Industrial clatter of Einstürzende Neubauten, the syringe-strewn gutter inhabited by Pussy Galore and Harry Pussy, the layered overload of High Rise and Boredoms, even the kiddie nightmares of Happy Flowers.

The group's latest album, *Absolutes*, rips open with "White Keys", which encapsulates Sightings' hallmarks—infinitesimal volume, tribal trashcan drums, bloody-lipped vocals buried in the burning mix like a melted black box in an aerodynamic wreck—in a mere two and a half minutes. From there, the needles relentlessly slash the red, from the rhythmic drilling of "Anna Mae Wong" to the tireless mechanical loop of "Bishops", which somehow induces hallucinations of Autochore played through a lawnmower. "We're at a point where our sounds have melted together," says drummer John Lockye. "It's not as obvious what the drums are doing, what the guitar is doing, and so on. Like on 'Infinity of Stops', the heavy bass tone is actually drums."

Sightings' merciless aural assault began in 1998, when Lockye and guitarist Mark Morgan, after jamming together for a year, found Hoffman through an

advertisement. At first the trio was instrumental, but "it was getting boring," says Morgan. "It was kind of anti actually. So I started singing, and it sort of freed the songs, made them more open-ended."

"It needed to become cruder," says Hoffman. "We were just getting our feet on the ground, not really taking chances. So we reconfigured things, and tried to find a way to avoid writing riffs or doing staid rock stuff." 2003 brought a 7" on Minneapolis noise imprint Freedom From, and a notoriously no-fil live cassette on Scrite. A year later, Sightings' self-titled debut emerged via the rising Providence label Load Records. With its bruising tracks like "Cuckoo" and the lobotomizing "I Feel Like A Porsche", Sightings has all the immediacy and raw energy of an early punk record. "I think we all had an 'Oh shit, this might be the only record we put out' attitude," says Hoffman. "We were too concerned with paying homage to our first couple of years of existence. The fact that we were putting out a record at all really took us by surprise."

But they didn't pull out all the stops until their second LP, *Michigan Haters*, released by Psycho-Path, a Brooklyn label run by Russian Prog rock aficionados. The difference is clearest on the reprise of "I Feel Like A Porsche", which slathers its predecessor in a massive layer of sludge. Other flash-floods like the Krautish "Chili Dog" and the skull-trepanning "Ich/it" drown any ears brave enough to ride. "It's certainly the most stark raving pissed-off stuff we've put on an album," says Morgan.

Since Sightings' sound constantly tests the limits of their gear, sticking their microphone-busting clatter in a studio seems futile, and so far each album consists of

live four-track recordings. "We record most of our practice sessions, and what goes on the record are the best takes," says Hoffman. "We haven't done any real overdubbing or editing. The only editing we've done is cutting a jam off before it actually ended."

"We'd like a record in a studio, use more tracks and instruments," says Hoffman. "The problem is where do you go when you're starting from such a big sound? How do you change without it being a letdown?" For now, the Sightings archival approach turns record making into a muddy archaeological dig. "There are things on our records that I have no recollection of," says Morgan. "Like 'Canadian Money', I don't remember playing that at all. And 'Reduction' we had played once or twice and thrown away. Then we went back and found it, and we were like, 'This rules!'"

Live, Sightings are a sweaty fog of stretched strings and strained muscles. "We still have a lot of room for improvement live. For a while we were more about getting drunk and abusing ourselves, our instruments, and our audience," says Hoffman. "But we shoot for more subtleties now, and we are really lit or miss. I think it comes with trying not to sound familiar."

"Some of our songs are really intense, really repetitive," says Lockye. "We get exhausted after a while, but that's why we do it. We want to push it as far as we can, and see how it comes out." Alongside this physical intensity is a beautifully uncomplicated delight in the power of unhampered noise. "Our music is not some kind of bogus 'fuck you' statement," says Morgan. "I like this sound, and this band is just fun as all hell to play in." □ *Absolutes* is out this month on Load Records (CD) and Riot Season (vinyl)

JAGA JAZZIST THE STIX

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Yoshinori Time Travel
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Dias for Dais

UPCOMING RELEASES
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Martin Brandesay
032 Matt Davis/Pat Durren/
Mark Westell (Jaka Wall)
033-040 AMPLIFY 2002:
balance box set (7 CDs/1 DVD,
details to be announced soon)
041 Sachiko M./Yoshinori
Nakamura/Otomo Yoshinori
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Olsson/Franz Hautsinger
043 Martin Tétreault/
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027



028



029



030-2

CLIFF MARTINEZ

Cristal method soundtracks.
By Richard Henderson



Writing film music can be a reclusive pursuit, as drummer turned film composer Cliff Martinez knows only too well. Martinez describes his housebound existence as solitary in the extreme when working on his scores for Steven Soderbergh films such as *Kafka*. Traffic on, most recently, *Solaris*. "The pizza slides under the door at five o'clock," he says merrily. "When I've done the film, I've got to make new friends, because all the old ones have given up on me." Still, there are far worse places to be marooned than Martinez's home, overlooking the western verge of California's San Fernando Valley. His entrance hall sports framed album art from *7out Mask Replica* signed 'Don' (as in Van Vliet, aka Captain Beefheart), a testament to Martinez's past life as drummer in the final incarnation of The Magic Band. Where the dining room would normally be, several percussion instruments of imposing design and scale now reside. Notable among these, its metal and glass armature glinting in the morning sun, is the Cristal, one of the legendary 'Structures Sonores' invented in 1954 by the French instrument designers Bernard and François Baschet.

"My parents took me to a show of their musical sculptures at New York's Museum of Modern Art in 1966," Martinez recalls, producing a vintage 10" album of the Baschet's music issued by the museum for the occasion. The huge instruments, with their blason-like metal resonating cones and sound generating mechanisms similar to a glass harmonica, made an indelible impression on the youngster. Long after moving to California in 1976, and well after his stints as drummer for The Weenies, Lydia Lunch, Jim Thirlwell, The Red Hot Chili Peppers and The Dickies, Martinez flew to France and sought out the Baschet brothers. He used the Cristal on his recent score for director Soderbergh's new, post-Tarkovsky adaptation of Polish writer Stanislaw Lem's 1951 novel *Solaris*. The soundtrack is an amalgam of Ambient orchestral charts and matching electronic timbres, melded with gamelan percussion and the vane strains of the Baschet's glistening construction.

Martinez entered the world of film music when a tape collage he had constructed ("Several of my friends

making aggressively weird noises, which I assigned to pads on a MIDI percussion controller") led to scoring an episode of comedian Paul Reubens' transgressive mid-80s TV hit, *Pee-wee's Playhouse*. This was heard by Steven Soderbergh, who tapped Martinez to provide the music for his first feature, sex, lies and videotape. Martinez has since received compositional credit on most of Soderbergh's films, in addition to critical favourites *Pump Up The Volume* and *Gray's Anatomy*. His achievement is impressive, given that he is largely self-educated in a realm where few expect rock drummers to emerge as successful composers.

Then again, drumming for Captain Beefheart And The Magic Band during the early 80s was a singular education. The liner notes accompanying *Good Fins*, the Beefheart retrospective set issued by Revenant, describe a tragic scenario: Martinez lands his dream gig, only to see Beefheart retire a short time later. It was also disappointing, Martinez admits with laughter, "finding out that your idol is an abusive drunk. Joe Cream For Crow was the first record [Van Vliet] decided not to support with a tour. He did an Anton Corbijn-directed video; that was the end of that record's promotion. Even among my peers there was no support or recognition. It was the hardest gig I'd ever had, 24 hours a day and very demanding, with zero recognition."

"The line-up that I belonged to were all scholars of the old band," continues Martinez. "How that original sound was created, I don't know. My guess is that all the band members made significant contributions and Don was the leader. Don would say to me, after handing over a cassette, 'Learn this bit'. I'd take it home and would find a recording of Don and his wife Jan in the kitchen. It just sounded like the tape recorder is running while they're talking and doing the dishes. Most of the tape featured huge WHOOOSH noises of the faucet being turned on, for an hour. Occasionally I'd hear plates clinking. Though I knew that some creative interpretation of his instructions was required, I listened to this thing! I must have reworked the wrong tape. I provided a rendition of what I heard, but it was a stretch. You had to fill in some serious blanks. The next day, I played my subjective

drumming response to what I'd heard on this tape and Don said, 'That's it, man. You knew what I wanted.' So I was extremely grateful."

"A lot of things were like that, 'Give me giant blue beads levitating over the mountain tops', and I'd just play Gary Lucas [Magic Band guitarist] has famously described this process as throwing a deck of cards in the air, taking a picture, then recreating that."

The *Solaris* orchestrations were crafted by Zappa and Beefheart alumnus Bruce Fowler and engineer Lesanne Urner, noted for her previous work with Laurie Anderson and Leonard Cohen, who recorded Martinez's own gamelan and Cristal performances at his Casa Cliff studio.

Deciding to eschew performing in favour of composing, Martinez confides, "I almost hung up my drumsticks after Beefheart. Normal drum playing had no appeal left. I became incredibly jaded. The response to *Ice Cream For Crow* was disappointing, but musically it was a Mount Rushmore moment for me. It took me deep into an arcane state of drumming that I'd admired for years and finally got to play. Art Trapp, another Zappa and Beefheart percussionist, once said, 'The higher the elevation, the sparser the vegetation', meaning the weirder you get, the fewer opportunities eschew to make money with your skills."

Martinez's scoring skills will next be on display with *Wonderland*, director James Cox's dramatisation of a sensational Los Angeles murder case which involved porn star John Holmes. His tone much darker and funnier than *Solaris*, the music for *Wonderland* has "a Stanky & Hutch vibe, with lots of Roland 303 Bassline sounds," remarks Martinez, citing the wonders of the tiny synth much loved by the hard Trance set. "It's yielding some fascinating music, though. I'm using the Cristal, which works marvellously during crime scenes, especially those featuring huge plumes of blood on the walls. It seems like there's much more latitude in film music. Large groups of people are exposed to unusual symphonic music in movie theatres, as well as ethnic and avant garde music. There's more range in film music and that's very attractive to me." □ *Solaris*: Original Motion Picture Score is available on Super/Edel



ASMUS TIETCHENS

Sceptic thinktank.
By Jim Haynes

"With EM Coran, I share a sceptical attitude towards history, mankind and questionable metaphysics," the German electronic composer Asmus Tietchens says, explaining why quotes by the Romanian philosopher are scattered throughout the liner notes of his recordings.

"Coran was in no way a pessimistic thinker, he was straight sceptic. That's a big difference."

While the Cologne based Tietchens is quick to clarify that his music is not merely the result of dry conceptual exercises, his labour-intensive investigations into electroacoustics, digital synthesis, and tape music hinge upon an adamant scepticism about the conventions and truisms of contemporary music. "I try to perceive consciously the audible part of the world," he says, "and I try to explore parts of the audible part of the world I've never heard before. The latter one is the main power behind my musical activities. Simply put, I have to create audible structures because I'm seeking for any new part of yet unknown musical areas. By the way, a lot of my curiosity is permanently satisfied by listening to other people's fine music. I'm a very busy listener."

Despite the fact that he began tinkering with sound back in 1965 while still at school, it wasn't until 1980 that Tietchens's first recording, *Nachtsstücke* (Night Pieces) (Egg), was released, although the music had been completed two years earlier. *Nachtsstücke*, alongside a quartet of releases on Sky (Biotope, Split-Europa, in Die Nacht und Luta), marked a "short pop intermezzo" for Tietchens, in which the quiescent sounds of synths such as the Moog Sonic Six and Minimoog offered a template of soft tones for Tietchens to sculpt into simple melodic passages and oscillating rhythms, hinting at a slightly more obtuse nature than his Kosmische brothers in Cluster (with whom he briefly collaborated on the 1977 LP *Cluster And Eno*). More recently, in the late 90s he returned to take the warm vapours with two quasi-hysterical synth exorcisms LPs under the name Hematic Sunsets, *Musik Aus Dem Aroma Club* and *Rendezvous Im Aroma Club*.

However, back in the early 80s, Tietchens had witnessed the flourishing of such groups as Nurse With Wound, Negativland and P.O.S.D., who pushed out of punk and Industrial culture and into a fertile

hybridization with the plastic arts of *musique concrète* and serialism. It was at this point that he came to the conclusion that his future was not as a pop composer. In 1982, he had a fortuitous meeting with David Elliott, who ran a British fanzine called *Neumusk*. Tietchens recalls, "David encouraged me to contact Steve Stapleton [of Nurse With Wound] and to send him demo material with my... let's say, more atonal stuff. Steve enjoyed the stuff, and two years later *Formen Letzter Hausmusik* was released on his United Dairies label."

Despite its initial small pressing of only 500 copies, *Formen Letzter Hausmusik* (Shapes Of Final Music Making In The Home) – a brutish album of raw tape constructions and jamming electroacoustics, mapping out a broad range of squiggled textures and queasy chromatics which put two of his influences, Ornette Coleman and Karlheinz Stockhausen, in communion – remains one of Tietchens's landmark albums, in which he returned to many of the radical tape music methods which he began in the late 60s. *Hausmusik*, in fact, features five compositions from 1967 alongside similarly styled contemporary recordings. Since then, Tietchens has pursued complex sets of abstractions, which he poetically calls "the majestic stillness of the inorganic." He continues, "This is an absolute music, meaning that it should not be more than itself, and that it should contain no message except an aesthetic one. Constructing and recording my music is permanent research work, and the studio is not a holy room, but a kind of laboratory without windows – literally. I will not run the risk of being distracted by visible phenomena."

While the mournful abstractions for prepared piano on *Notturmo* (1987) or the mechanical tape loop constructions of *Stupor Mundi* (1990) sound wholly unique, Tietchens claims his studio is rather conventional. "My main tools are the mixing desk, the multitracking devices – both analogue and digital – and a so-called 'Festfiltherbank', custom-built, for extreme filtering. Apart from the Festfiltherbank, I do not use any tool which would not be used by other musicians or composers. The devices themselves do not inspire me, because I know for sure that all my ideas can be realized. So I totally concentrate on my musical plans. Apart from some small software updates and two new mixing desks, I have used the same equipment since

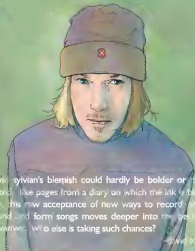
the early 90s. It is perfect for my approach."

Recently, the Berlin label Die Stadt has begun an impressive 18 CD reissue campaign of Tietchens's back catalogue, gradually making available all of his early vinyl albums released between 1980-91. The aforementioned *Nachtsstücke* leads off the series, released as a double disc set with the archival recording *Adventures in Sound* that dates back to Tietchens's earliest works in 1965, paralleling many of the sounds on the *Hausmusik* album. A collection of recordings made in by Tietchens, Okeo Becker (who still lends a production hand to Tietchens's work) and Hans Deiter Wohlmann, *Adventures in Sound* is a playful, anti-structuralist mess of sound with a spirited grasp of psychedelic improvisation and free jazz run through primitive tape machine tricks (backwards masking, variable speed manipulation, rudimentary splicing, etc.). Another ongoing project is the duo Kontakt Der Jünglinge with drone connoisseur Thomas Köner. Their recent fourth CD, on Die Stadt, is number -1 (the series is numbered backwards). Curiously, all of these recordings have been documented in live performances, where Tietchens feels this duo works best, while almost all his other collaborations have been mail art projects, firmly entrenched in the studio.

Far from resting on the laurels of this retrospective series, Tietchens maintains an exhausting pace in his work, with plans for a fourth collaboration with David Lee Meyers (formerly known as Arcane Device); and is currently completing the fourth in his *Reimenge* series for the Middle Plateaus subsidiary Ritornel, in light of his numerous activities, Tietchens hopes that his work offers the potential for his audience to ask questions and participate in his discoveries. He posits, "Perhaps the music I compose seems a bit 'outlandish'. But I've noticed that experts as well as untrained listeners are able to enjoy my music. No, I do not think that it's necessary to know the culture around noise, concrete, or electronic music to enjoy my stuff." □ *Gimme Meige* is out now on Ritornel. Die Stadt's reissue programme is ongoing (see www.diestadtmusic.de). Tietchens & Jon Mueller's 7 "Stücke" is out now on Auf Abwegen. Asmus Tietchens Website: www.tietchens.de. Thanks to Jon Leidecker for help with this article.

david sylvian | blemish

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david sylvian's blemish could hardly be bolder or more naked. like pages from a diary on which the ink is barely dry, this raw acceptance of new ways to record shape sound and form songs moves deeper into the unknown. who else is taking such chances?

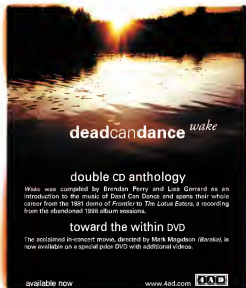
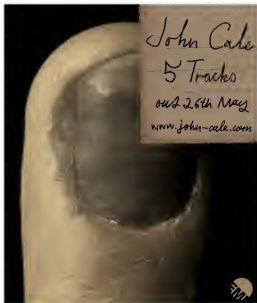
—dave kipp

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PLEASE BE GONE BY MORNING
AND IF THE ENDING IS CLEAN
THE QUIRK THE FUSS THE
VASELINE SHE WON'T EVEN
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ROLL THEM OVER, ROLL THEM
OVER ME, THE ONLY DAUGHTER

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deadcan dance *wake*

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A survey of sounds from around the planet.
This month: Eran Sachs investigates Fact Records' struggle to
fill the cultural void in Israel's largest, poorest city

One nation underground: Yuppies With Jeeps (left), Charlie Megra



GLOBAL EAR:

JERUSALEM

"Jerusalem is not really a city," contends Aviad Albert of the local electronics duo TeePet. "The population is quite big, the separation between the different groups is so fierce, that there is no actual common urban space. Each group remains sealed and leads its own closed life." The inhabitants of Jerusalem, Israel's biggest and poorest city, are equally divided between Arabs, most of whom are Palestinians living in East Jerusalem under Israeli occupation; Orthodox religious Jews, generally very poor, but politically dominant; and secular Jews living mainly in West Jerusalem. These three groups are in turn fragmented into even smaller communities. The occupation leaves its traces everywhere. What with the increasing violence and worsening economic depression across a city whose municipal authority pays little attention to the needs of its citizens, and whose secular portion is rapidly diminishing, it is no wonder there are few opportunities for artistic and musical activity to take place in public.

In recent years, several groups of young artists from West Jerusalem have been attempting to change this situation. The activities of the action group Electronic Front and the Techno parties thrown by 300 Meter Underground (both are collectives involving promoters, artists and other proselytes for electronic music), as well as the broadcasts on the pirate station, Penelope Radio, are all driven by the necessity of filling Israel's cultural void. But with no real chance of making any profit, all these groups operate on a purely

philanthropic basis. As Albert points out, "Such phenomena are characteristic of a small place."

When things do happen, audiences are quick to show their commitment. In April 2002, a suicide bomber blew himself up in a marketplace, just yards from where an art event called Hleera 2 was supposed to start a few hours later. Despite the disruption and destruction, the event went ahead, attended by more than 270 people.

The most stable element in Jerusalem's music scene over the last few years has been the GDR label Fact Records, run by the 26 year old Yoram Elakim. Apart from being one of the very few labels in the entire country, Fact was the first notable label in the city to persistently produce cutting edge musicians since the 80s. It was conceived as an outlet for Israel's bedroom musicians. Elakim ran a record store called Balance, which became a hub for local musicians who

regularly bombarded him with their tapes and demos. Three and a half years ago, he started releasing small-run CD-Rs of this otherwise overlooked material.

Hearing the forgotten 1989 album *Jehova* by the avant rock/industrial/HipHop group Israel, who made subversive calls for a total change in national consciousness (a utopian state of mind they call "The Israeli Revolution"), Elakim decided he would also release out of print recordings of older, non-mainstream Israeli music. "[Jehova] seemed to me like a real radical piece to come out in this country at the time," he explains. "Those people were militants, but on a par with the avant garde world of their time."

Throughout the first year Fact's catalogue stretched to around 20 releases. "I believe in a community," Elakim says modestly. "The idea was to become like this community centre." Three years on, Fact became the most active independent label in Israel, representing a huge range of contemporary music that's barely heard outside the country. The catalogue now spans over 60 releases, with certain titles selling hundreds of copies all over Israel. With time, specific stylistic divisions have evolved. Artists like Yuppies With Jeeps create alternative rock sung in Hebrew. Others choose to sing in English, like 37 year old Tsuky from Ramat-Gan, who combines acoustic instruments and electronics in a kind of melodic, gloomy Krautrock. Among a raft of electronic artists and HipHop projects like Subsoniq, there have been further releases such as Plastic Venus's self-titled 1991 debut — the first noise album to be released in Israel, from Tel Aviv's thriving late 80s alternative rock scene.

But the label's achievement does not lie solely in the variety of its releases. The catalogue foregrounds a multifaceted, critical, alternative Israel culture different from the uniformity presented in the media; one which refuses the prevailing political, cultural and artistic consensus. "Summit Meeting", Purple 59's collaboration with rap star Sha'anan Street and Palestinian rapper TN, deals explicitly with the Occupation and individual responsibility (mainstream Israeli HipHop just won't go there). Charlie Megra & The Lawless Girl's deejayry tributes to garage-based pop ballads deconstructs Israel's musical history by acknowledging the existence of an early rock 'n' roll culture in the 50s, pointing to an alternative to the ubiquitous military bands of the time. Meanwhile,

TeePet deliberately hold back the grooves in order to move away from MIDI-based industrial metallica, in a manner that recalls Brian Eno or Microtones. The aforementioned Israeli call for a revolution of the mind, renouncing anything Jewish. Juan Spady's *Lenses* project expresses the personal pain of the Palestinian minority in "Tied Up" and "The Old Man", the first alternative rock songs in Israel to be sung in Arabic.

In March this year Fact released two compilations, *Electronic Facts* and *Fact By Fact 2*. They focus on a wide range of electronics styles: from the Max/MSP work of artists such as Ran Slavin and D Fire; the playful Techno-dub of Birya Reches; the Casio-led Easy Listening melodies of Gelbart. The release of these two compilations was celebrated at a mini-festival held at three different locations in Tel Aviv, and attended by more than 1000 people.

A few days after the festival — the same day the Americans invade Iraq — I throw my gas mask in the car and drive over to interview Elakim, who drops a bombshell: "I've decided to shut down the label." Once he left the record store, he explains, the label could no longer sustain itself according to its original model. "I should have been on 'crisis control' by now," he complains, "but it didn't work, because everything started going backwards in this country, the currency started losing its value, the economy is in a state of depression... reality became more and more radical. It's unbelievable."

So once again there is a void in Jerusalem that needs filling. Fact has provided a source of energy and a model for the next wave — there are now at least five other labels operating in Jerusalem. "Our vision is different," says SC Despair of the Mixistaktik.com imprint, "but Yoram showed how things could be done. I saw it and said, 'Hey, I can also design covers and burn CDs.'" Ramer Weiner and Harel Schreiber started their own label Ak Duck, which focuses on electro, after Yoram rejected their CD. "He paved the way for us," says Weiner. "Fact has a good and caring system, but it leaves out the genre we like. So we can do something along the same lines, only with music we like." Fact Records ceased operating earlier this year, but are still selling CD-Rs via their Website: www.factrecords.co.il. Eran Sachs's collaboration with singer Rockstar Wannabe appears on the compilation *Electronic Facts*.

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between the lines

INVISIBLE JUKEBOX:

DAVID SYLVIAN

Every month we play a musician a series of records which asked to identify and comment on – with no prior knowledge of what they're about to hear.
Tested by Christoph Cox. Photos by Chris Buck

Born David Batt in 1958, David Sylvian was raised in South London. He began playing guitar at the age of 12 and, four years later, formed Japan with his brother, drummer Steve Jansen, and schoolmates Mick Karn and Richard Barbieri. After three records for the German label Hansa, Japan signed to Virgin and emerged as stars of the New Romantic scene, crafting an atmospheric synth-pop fronted by Sylvian's quivering baritone. But in 1982, wary of the pop life, the shy and private Sylvian called it quits, disbanding Japan at the height of its fame.

Retreating into the studio, Sylvian began what was to become a long collaboration with Ryuichi Sakamoto, with whom he produced a string of singles, among them "Forbidden Colours", the theme to Nagisa Oshima's 1983 film *Merry Christmas Mr. Lawrence*. 1984 saw the release of Sylvian's solo masterpiece, *Brilliant Trees*, which included contributions by Sakamoto, Jon Hassell and Holger Czukay. The same year, Sylvian co-directed (with Yasuyuki Yamaguchi) the art films *Preparations For A Journey* and *Steel Cathedrals*, both shot in Japan. Sylvian's interest in Fourth World Ambient culture found expression on record as well, beginning with the 1985 release *Words With The Shaman* and continuing with two Czukay collaborations, *Plight and Premonition* (1988) and *Flux And Mutability* (1989).

In the mid-'80s, Sylvian began work with another steadfast collaborator, Robert Fripp, with whom he recorded the double-album *Gone To Earth* (1986). In 1992, while working on the Sakamoto single "Heartbeat", Sylvian met Ingrid Chavez, a singer and actress who had been a member of Prince's inner circle. The same year, the couple married and moved to Minneapolis, where they spent the remainder of the decade. Sylvian continued his collaborations with Fripp and began a series of recording sessions that resulted in the 1999 release of *Dead Bees On A Cake*, which featured Kenny Wheeler, Marc Ribot, Bill Frisell and Talvin Singh.

Dead Bees On A Cake offered musical glimpses into the Hindu mysticism to which Sylvian and Chavez had become devoted. Upon completing the record, the couple and their three children moved to Napa Valley for a brief stay at the ashram of spiritual teacher Shree Ma before relocating to southern New Hampshire, where Sylvian converted an old barn into a music studio and began a new creative phase. He ended his 20 year relationship with Virgin and, earlier this year, launched a new record label, Samadhi Sound. The label's first release, Sylvian's own *Blemish*, out this month, is a collection of spare but lovely songs that includes duets with Derek Bailey and Christian Fennesz.

The Jukebox took place in Sylvian's barn studio in New Hampshire.

TALK TALK "AFTER THE FLOOD"

FROM LAUGHING STOCK (POLYDOR) 1991

The drums would hint at Talk Talk. But I don't recognize the track. It's "After The Flood". Talk Talk first came on the scene during Japan's heyday. Do you remember those days with any fondness?

Oh, gosh. It was just a period of constant education. I look at it as basically my schooling. During my years with Japan, I learned how to open up a lot more as a writer, and finally to find a voice that I felt was somewhat true. Up until that time, I felt too insecure to allow my voice to be heard in my own work. Music was something of an act of concealment. And I realized that that was a misuse of the power of music. I wanted to address that and I felt I'd made some kind of personal leap when I wrote "Ghosts" [1981], and included on Japan's final album, *Tin Drum*. After that, everything fell into place for me and I realised that this was the road I had to walk down, to dig deeper.

Like you, Talk Talk also shed their New Romantic past to produce much richer, more textual and mysterious music.

There are the ups and downs of growing up in public. You have the means to explore all the different avenues—that's a wonderful aspect. But of course, you make your mistakes as you go along; and people can fall in love with the mistakes and want you to pursue those avenues more than anything else, more than where your interests lie. There's the danger of alienating people as you develop as an artist. It's that idea of remaining creatively vital as opposed to commercially viable—not that those terms are mutually exclusive.

DAVID BOWIE "IT'S NO GAME (PART I)"

FROM SCARY MONSTERS (AND SUPER CREAKS) (VIRGIN) 1980

[Instantly.] I know this. It's Bowie. Scary Monsters? I don't know the name of the track.

"It's No Game", with Robert Fripp on guitar.

Robert's played some of his best work on other people's material. He knows that too. He loves to just jump into a session and feed back off of the energy in that session. This is a good example of that.

You have said that you don't think your collaboration with Fripp was entirely successful.

Well, the collaboration came as a very difficult time for both me and Robert. I was going through some quite profound psychological difficulties in my life, and he was going through some tortuous legalities with [his record label] EG. I often look back and think it was remarkable that we produced anything together during that period. I felt that Robert and I definitely connected on *Gone To Earth*. And there was talk of pursuing some work together at some point in the future. As he was coming out of retirement, he called me and asked me to become a part of the King Crimson line-up, which I gave serious thought to; but ultimately, I couldn't take on the baggage of that history. I suggested we do something other. But somehow, I feel I was roped into the new *Crimson*, in a way. But from my perspective, the music provided an outlet for some serious, perhaps aggression, which I don't think I would have been able to explore with such abandon in my own work. It would have surfaced in an entirely other way.

Was Bowie significant for you and Japan?

Oh definitely. He was one of the key influences in the early days. And this is probably one of his strongest records. But what can I say? Around this time, I put aside a lot of the early influences that played such a formative role in my development, because I felt that the influence was overbearing. As a group, we [Japan] were our influences on our sleeve, which I think was enduring in some ways, but in other ways it was detrimental to our own development. So it was

necessary to push that behind us and move on. I found the best way to do that was just to shut the work out entirely.

RYUICHI SAKAMOTO "DERRIDA/DJ002"

FROM DERRIDA (NABU) 2003

[Immediately.] It's either Takemitsu or Ryuichi. Or Cage. Is it [Takemitsu's] *Corona*? It's a segment from Sakamoto's soundtrack to the new film, *Derrida*, about the French deconstructionist philosopher Jacques Derrida. It's a really successful soundtrack; it colours the images with a sense of enigma appropriate to Derrida. That's a great compliment to Ryuichi's ability. You've collaborated with him for more than two decades now.

I've found that, as years have gone on, and in the absence of a permanent band with which to work, he becomes maybe the closest collaborator in that we share a common musical vocabulary. That's so important, I think, to move beyond one's limitations, to develop that vocabulary over a length of time, I think that is what I miss about working within a group. Ryuichi and I rarely use language to point and another in a given direction. We'll play our work to one another, and, immediately, there's a connection and we go with it.

You recently worked with Ryuichi on the Zero Landmine benefit CD. I was surprised to see you so directly take on a political issue in your music.

That's a field that I've always been reluctant to get into. I think that music has a far greater power. It works on a far more profound and deeper levels than the political. I mean, yes, it's important sometimes just to get up and say what needs to be said, if nobody else is saying it. But the power of music runs so much deeper, and in that sense, it's a far greater political tool because it has the potential to change fundamentally the mind or the heart of the individual. That is the most profound political act you can make; and I prefer to work on that level of profundity rather than voice openly political statements about this or that subject matter. Sakamoto's been active in the anti-war movement. We're working on some music now that he calls "cham music," which he's sending around to a variety of different people to accompany the anti-war sentiment; and I'm right there with him. It is a challenge to take on this subject matter and not to give in to cliché and a certain amount of dogmatism. It is very challenging, because it's so easy to fail.

HOLGER CZUKAY "DER OSTEN IST ROT"

FROM DER OSTEN IST ROT (VIRGIN) 1984

I know this. Oh, it's Holger. "The East Is Red"? I haven't heard this in a very long time. It's fantastic. Apparently, he found a statement by a Chinese official claiming that rock music turns people into homosexuals and drug addicts. So he decided to offer this rebuttal of the ideological national anthem. That's right. I remember that. [Laughter] Holger's amazing. I look back to what he was doing when I was working with him and I see that his approach was the same as that of a lot of the younger musicians working today: the detailed sampling of very small fragments of sound and music and then the cut and paste approach to creating work. He was right there, way back on *Movies* [1979]. He knew that as well. He was always very aware that what he was doing was the precursor of what was to come. It's just a far more complex procedure with analogue tape, obviously; but it also allowed for a lot of accidents to take place, which is an essential part of what he does. When you're working with Holger, if you find that you're getting close to the performance that you would like to achieve, he

loses interest entirely. And those times when you felt you were just just grasping in the dark for something else—the moments that really fascinated him. He caught them on tape. You weren't even aware that you were being recorded.

The records you made with him seemed to take your music in a different direction, toward a kind of fluid, ethereal instrumental music.

It was a great relief to create work in which the central focus was not my voice. I'd been leaning towards that in some of the work I had been doing. I was introducing more and more instrumental passages into the work. The voice was very important to me. It focuses the emotional content of the piece of music, or increases the emotional intensity of a work. In a sense, everything else pivots around that. But sometimes you want the work to be more like a landscape in which you can find a whole myriad of different emotions, depending on your mood as a listener. What we were doing with *Flight And Promontory* was trying to create a work that was very organic, that had no angular voice. If one of us began to 'perform', it would cause such a disruption in the work, like somebody's ego was forcing its way into the picture, some landscape was about to be peeped; and it felt entirely wrong. He kept that in check more than I did.

ALICE COLTRANE "A LOVE SUPREME"

FROM *WORLD GALAXY* (IMPULSE) 1971

Is that Alice Coltrane?

Yes, it's her version of "A Love Supreme," featuring the voice of her guru, Swami Satchidananda.

What I live about Alice Coltrane is that it's a progressive form of spiritual music, you know? There are no platitudes in her work and no dogma. It just breathes the spirit that created it. And I find that a real resonance in the work of 'spiritual music.' I mean the whole New Age movement—I don't think they ever took a leaf out of her or John Coltrane's book! This is profound, spiritual music that touches to the core essence of what it's dealing with, which is extremely powerful, wild, unpredictable, blissful but also profoundly disturbing, disorientating. I play this partly to ask you a little bit about the ways in which your spiritual beliefs enters into your work. [The Hindu mystic] Shree Ma sings a song on *Dead Bees On A Caker*, and the track "Kishna Bhoo" seems to make some reference to your spirituality. But please, you seem to avoid such direct references or connections.

That album has a lot of references to direct experiences that I was lucky enough to participate in at that time in my life. I guess I felt it was a point in time when I could open up those gates and let come what needed to come through, which was more of a joyous celebration of the visceral states that I was experiencing, and also the trauma of letting go of certain aspects of the ego. The ego's going to hold on to the better end anyway; but there are aspects of it that are the firm to go which can be profoundly painful and traumatic experiences where there is an enormous sense of loss: loss of self, loss of identity, loss of the paraphernalia with which you clothe yourself to face the world. When that starts to dissipate, to fade, to crumble, you feel quite naked and quite vulnerable.

Shree Ma came to stay in our home for a week and I had enormously profound experiences during those seven days. But when you feel that you've unlocked so many doors, you feel that, at some point, you're going to become acclimated to the vulnerability, to the sensitivity. But then you find that there are more profound and more fugitive levels to dwell with; and, as far as I'm concerned, it doesn't ever get easier. What drives you is that the highs get higher and you can go to greater states of clarity, profundity, and just

out-and-out communion with the world in which you live. That's what drives me on, anyway when I find myself rigid with fear, where I feel that I cannot move.

Do you feel that your spirituality is always part of your work, whether it's direct or not?

Oh absolutely. It's all part of the journey. It can't fail to be a part of it, if you're trying to open up to yourself and really dig deep. After the *Dead Bees* album, Virgin didn't want a new album from me. They wanted compilation works, and it was stifling me. And when I finally got into this studio and I started creating work with my brother [Steve Jansen], I felt empty and dead inside. I didn't think there was anything there. It was really worrying. And then I tapped into this vein when I started producing [Blenshin], and it was so rich, but it was an enormously painful process as well [laughs], of standing naked and not being afraid of just letting come through what was coming through.

The new record is strikingly and beautifully experimental.

It's funny, when you're creating work, there's often a time when you feel you're at a point in your life where you have absolutely nothing to lose. And they are potentially very powerful moments in your creative life, because you throw caution to the wind. You just dive in deeply and you say, 'Anything, anything rather than what has gone before.'

ALEXANDER DAVAKAI "EXCERPT FROM SHAMANIC HEALING RITUAL"

FROM *RAW VOICES FROM THE CENTRE OF ASIA*
(SMITHSONIAN FOUNDATION) 1992

Is this [David] Toop's recording of the [Yanomami] shamans?

It is a shamanic healing ritual.

Right. It's instantly recognizable as that. But I couldn't recognise the recording.

It's Smithsonian record of Tuvan songs and voices. Is the geographical location recognizable?

No, no. Not for me. But there's clearly some kind of healing taking place. It's quite beautiful, isn't it? I'm very interested in the power of music to work on this level. My guru, Amma, she also sings. And Shree Ma is a beautiful singer. They choose to work through music to elevate the spirit. With them, music is pure light. That's in contrast to what we spoke about earlier, where I talked about trying to show the full spectrum of the human condition. The healing music that is produced by spiritual teachers tends to be just light, pure light. And only they could possibly create that work; only a being that is as high as that could manifest that energy and that spirit. It's the kind of music I only want to listen to live. I don't listen to it on record.

The record is just a document.

Exactly. Funny enough, the same can be said of certain free jazz players. Cecil Taylor comes to mind. His work on record baffled me. I couldn't get the point of it. When I went to see him live, initially there was the bafflement. But 30 minutes into the performance, there was a bubbling, everything fell into place. It was like you were hearing the molecules bounce off one another. Suddenly the mind went and the heart opened up, and there was the experience. I went back the next night to see if the same thing would happen, and it did. I tried to gain the same experience through listening to his recorded works, and I never got it back. I think that must be of a similar, comparable spirit: to sacred music, which has to be heard live.

There's so much 'immolation' out there that doesn't have that spirit, that doesn't have the possession of spirit in the performance. Coltrane had it. And that's why we're still in wonderment when we listen to his work. But I wonder how many players, that time, have really understood that.

FENNEZ "ENDLESS SUMMER"

FROM *CHRISTIAN FENNEZ MUSIC* 2001

Is it Christian [Fennetz]? Which album is it from?

It's the title track from *Endless Summer*.

I love that. It's so beautiful. That's the track that turned me onto his work. He sent me that originally to see if I was interested in doing something together. He said he was writing a new album and asked if I would contribute vocals to it. I said, 'Sure, if you're willing to contribute something to mine.'

What I liked about his work is that there's a melodicism to it. It wasn't all some manipulation, it really had a heart to it. Somehow, I was talking to Ryukoh about two years ago and he said, 'Do you still listen to music?' I said, 'Well, I still tend to buy a lot of music and I listen to a fair amount of it. But I'm not touched by it, I'm not moved by it.' He said, 'Yeah, that's right. It's just a process of education. It's a means of finding out what is now possible with this or that technology. You're no longer listening to music. You're doing research.' And what I liked about Christian's work is that there it all was: modern technology, but in the service of the heart. I always come back to the heart. There is a spirit to the work that allows it to rise above others in this genre that are equally fascinating. I think of Oval and Pan Sonic. But I'm often left a little bit cold.

Even in Fennetz's noisiest work, it often seems as though there is a beautiful melody trying to surface.

Funny enough, the track that I sent him, 'Fire In The Forest', sat so far out of context with the rest of the album; it was overly melodic and overly sentimental. It was a lullaby for neurotics, and it needed to be made a little bit stranger, more disturbing, to balance out the sweetness of the melody and the simplicity of the lyric. So I sent it to Christian precisely because I wanted him to know with it [laughs]. He was struggling with it for awhile. I think he fell in love with the song and had trouble deconstructing it. He finally sent it back and said, 'Well, it's still a lullaby for neurotics, but I hope you like what I've done.' And I did.

I found working on *Bleeding Trees* that I really travelled a long way with a piece called 'Weathered Hill'. The arrangement of the piece was very open, very sparse. I found that the elements that Holger brought to the table—little samples from the Dataphone that he was using at the time—were so much more profound in terms of accentuating the emotional content of the piece than any sound that you could come up with. Anger in pop music is often stereotypical. It's the stamping of the foot, the childish response to that emotion. But to be able to allude to those frustrations, anger, and more destructive emotions that one feels in a far more suppressed manner in the work, as in life, was fascinating to me. It's the suppression that's fascinating. Once we suppress something as powerful as, say, desire or anger, it will manifest itself in so many other ways in one's life. Somehow, music in its formlessness can allude to so much more readily than any of the other arts. Cinema comes close, and so does poetry. But music still has the upper hand.

DEREK BAILEY "STELLA BY STARLIGHT"

FROM *BALLADS* (TZADIK) 2002

[Laughs as the sweet melody is suddenly sliced through by an angular chord] Well there's a glee! It's from *Ballads*, right? I love this record. It's beautiful, so beautiful.

How did your collaboration with Derek Bailey come about?

I've been listening to Derek's work since 84 or 83. I was really drawn to the sound that he produced on the guitar. I'd seen him perform over the years and sort of just tapped into what he's been doing on and off. But

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it wasn't until I heard this album at this moment in my life that I felt, 'There it is. There's the opportunity that I was looking for back in 1990 with Keith [Tippet].' I could finally see a way in.

Now, it's still not improvisation in the pure sense. We're not sitting in the room together performing. He recorded in London and sent the tapes to me here. I listened to the session one time and singled out a few pieces. And then, the second time I heard the pieces, I scribbled down lyrics and melody and then went for it on the third run-through. For me, that is improvisation. That's as close as I can come to it — especially as a lyricist. I have trouble with the whole sort vocalist thing. Forget it. **It seems to me that his playing really shaped your vocal lines.**

Absolutely. It determined everything, everywhere I went melodically and emotionally. I had a notebook of fragments. Once I had selected a track that I felt held certain possibilities for me as a vocalist, I'd respond with an opening line, intuitively, and then I'd run with that. Then I'd grab snippets from the notebook and respond to those fragments, and flesh out the lyric within the first or second listen to the piece, improvising the melody based on what I was hearing. There are wonderful switches in dynamics in Derek's work, which isn't always true of my work. It was just a matter of finding my way into the piece, in the emotional heart of the music.

BLIND WILLIE JOHNSON "JOHN THE REVELATOR"

FROM *ANTHOLOGY OF AMERICAN FOLK MUSIC*
(SMITHSONIAN FOLKWAYS) 1985/1998

I have no idea.

It's Blind Willie Johnson, from the Harry Smith anthology. Your work doesn't generally have a bluesy feel, but a number of tracks on *Dead Bones On A Cake* reference the blues and other uniquely American musics.

It was mainly influenced by my wife, because that's a genre of music that she loves. I was initially writing material for her own project, for her to sing. I was leaning toward R&B because I thought that would really appeal to her. But she failed to make a connection with the material. And when it came time for me to write my album, I was feeling a connection with it. It was tapping into the American musical culture, to some degree. But I am no purist. I don't consider myself a musician that has 'roots' as such. **You've been living in America now for more than a decade. Has living here changed your relationship to American music?**

I was never drawn by American culture per se. Quite the reverse, in fact. I could go back to the time of punk and Patti Smith and Television — that was when I was immersed in the culture somewhat. But I lost the thread of it after that and my interests went further and further afield. What I found is that, during the decade that I've been living in the States, you could potentially be just about anywhere in the world. The Internet changes everything in that respect. So, 'What is your immediate culture?' is the question now. I guess I embrace that fully. I don't think I could survive on a staple diet of American culture if I'm sorry to say [laughs]. There are beautiful elements to it, and musically there's a lot going on. But a broader palette, a broader spectrum — you need that, I think.

My heart still belongs in Europe, and I find myself going back there more frequently now. And in the current political climate... I have a lot of friends that have left the country. There's something happening here that is enormously dangerous and quite oppressive. Maybe it's time to stand on that soapbox and put the word out, because there are becoming fewer and fewer options to speak out against what's going on. And it has to be said. □



ALWAYS SEARCHING FOR A KEY

The realisation that she was black in a country run by whites, a woman in a world run by men, turned Nina Simone into the voice of a revolution. Ian Penman pays tribute to a singer whose multifaceted song distilled the concentrated essence of hope

Gil Scott-Heron said she was black before it was fashionable to be black. H Rap Brown said she was the singer of the black revolution. These are heavy weights to carry, as well as loving tributes, and perhaps it is no surprise that today such words are scarcely unfashionable, verbatim: you're not black, you're Urban; our role models aspire to 'top-down' consumer penetration, not revolutionary ire.

She was born Eunice Wayborn and raised in a small North Carolina town, and later said she never noticed much prejudice when she was growing up there; some of the town's white citizens even helped to pay for the obviously gifted child's musical education. The miss-education of little Eunice (and the first of her battles against all the white eunuchs) duly arrived, when at an early recital some anonymous white family sought to force her mother and father from their front row seats. Still only 11, Eunice (or perhaps Nina, already) spoke up to say she wouldn't perform unless her parents remained in place.

Audience members laughed and jeered at this

reasonable demand.

Simone later said she felt as if she had been (note the word) flayed.

To these ears, the use of the word 'diva' to pigeonhole her later in her career was just one more attempt – no matter how well intentioned – to pretend her skin wasn't there, made no difference, felt away somehow the moment she took to a stage. To pretend there was no pain, no politics; to jeer and laugh one more time at... funny Nina, wonky Nina, obstreperous Nina, Nina with the outsize dreams...

She found that her fingers thought naturally along classical lines, and wanted to become the first black concert pianist. But after a year's scholarship at Juilliard, she was turned down by the major colleges – edged out with the unspoken sign-off, "You must agree this is better for both of us." Juilliard proved predictably unpleasant – she found the same racism there as in other establishment outposts. Not merely backroads racism – but a broader agenda, set on

pinning her down to some manageable essence. *Blues is your place, not black.* The existential backwash blues.

She didn't take this lying down, so got a reputation for being 'difficult', which was just one more way of identifying (and denoting) someone who had no compunction about voicing a grievance. (Cecil Taylor – 'difficult', Ishmael Reed – 'difficult', Even Lauryn Hill – 'difficult'.) Someone who won't wait for the Other to answer in their place.

She said: "Music was a gift and a burden I've had since I can remember who I was." How much of her life was a Being – tenuously caught and managed, daily anticipated and nightly discarded – on stage? It becomes easier to understand her 'tantrums' or the difficulty she often found with 'performing' if you remember that every stage was perhaps haunted by the spectres of that first recital. The stage became a mirror become a cage become a jeering mob. At any moment kindness can turn into cruelty and denison, your being can be repossessed. You cannot mould the



simplest of dreams, and futures, because they rely on the distatory beneficence of the Other.

In the late 50s she relocated to New York City. She had her head turned, her worst fears articulated and her waking dreams shaped by meetings with remarkable men and women like Langston Hughes, James Baldwin, Stokely Carmichael and playwright Lorraine Hansberry. Texts by Frantz Fanon, Camus and, later, Angela Davis. She said she started to see herself as a black person in a country run by white people and as a woman in a world run by men...

Singing, you don't really SEE yourself as such, you see either the audience or an abyssal darkness of eyes shut tight and let the *holier* take you under or a whisper take you out into the waiting WAVES there in the blue behind your eyes in the sea line at the edge of your mind it is safer there when you sing and when you inhabit these songs you know they don't know what to make of your voice, never quite gospel or blues or easy swallow supper jazz or easy access carnality, no, these tones are not so easily found or named, maybe it is something called freedom, not so easily held and sustained, its call like sand or breeze or flame, so your voice is sometimes awkward as if you yourself don't know where it will also not, sometimes downhome rowdy, sometimes delicate as betrayal...

And always, always, the work of mourning.

Each morning, it sometimes seems, mourning anew: for Medgar Evers, for those four little black girls in Alabama blown apart in church by white "Christians", Malcolm X in 1965, Martin Luther King in 1968, George Jackson in 1971. America's answer to every difficult question: a bullet, and a target, and blood. She took to calling her "homeland" the United Snakes of America.

She said: "They are killing us one by one."

She said her vibrant masterpiece "Mississippi Goddam" "a shoutnote for a show that hasn't been written yet".

She sang: "I WISH I KNEW HOW IT WOULD FEEL TO BE FREE."

She showed how free she was by performing in Mississippi, defying the death threats she now received as a matter of course. (Oh, land of the free and home of the brave!) Nina sang, and the FBI listened: she was now being monitored, spied upon. Miss Simone withheld taxes from her warlike government: Nina fought for musicians' rights. The Last Poets sang, "I am the wish that makes Nina Simone wish she knew how it felt to be free." But the wish was increasingly difficult: infiltration, betrayal, extortion, assassination, COINTELPRO, prison sentences, Nixon.

With ever more to mourn, she began to see even her black audiences as spectres of defeat, sellout, no future. She stalled, fell silent, withdrew. Songs burned in her throat. She began a long night of silence/exile/cassidness in Barbados, Liberia, London, Amsterdam and then finally France.

She still performed, but ever ahead of her time, people weren't quite ready for the schizo blues. There were suicide attempts, too much drinking, financial mismanagement, ratfink lovers: the full catastrophe. And maybe in later life she was a honor to be around; but I'm not sure I even want to know about all that, that I want to be a zoo keeper at her pen and disarray via peep-through-the-bars journalism, or what the point in knowing all this off-days stuff might really be. Easy enough to paint her a diva gone to seed, sinking bottles of Baileys for breakfast. Harder to plumb the pain and perplexity that lie behind such desperate measures. Memories of lynchings; justifiable paranoia about surveillance and persecution and friends who've sold you out; the hurt of permanent exile. You surely don't need much

delicacy or sympathy or nous to work out she maybe found herself in some pretty vicious circles. The catch-22 being: she has been ripped off – daily she sees "My Baby Just Cares For Me" clogging up millions (and it was precisely a series of hard nosed Babies who ripped her off and defrauded her) – she is broke and she needs money so she needs to be the Performing Geek and do interviews (which she hates) one more time... and so maybe she turns the hatred and fear against herself and the interviewer duly gets the Mush Mouthed Nina they wanted... and one more layer of skin is gone... and on goes the vicious circle...

One more thing to mourn. Stolen monies, despoiled innocence, innermost dreams.

Singing, she remembers the dreams, reclaims some dignity. Sober, the daylight offends her eyes and remembrance has the sound of opening bomb hatches and what for latecomers are delights ("Even Lana Turner's smile/is something he can't see") remain for her mnemonic daggers, reminders of rip-off and irrevocable loss, her own self-destructive earnestness and ardor and spite.

She was called "diva", which was maybe just one more way of not listening to what she had to say. She was called diva as I don't doubt she was called many other names (which elucidated and stereotyped her) over the course of her long and thorny and perplexing life. She was queen, not diva, Erzulie. The woman in the red dress. Nefertiti. Orpheus & Eurydice in one "right on" chorus. "Nina Simone" was, after all, only a stage name, not her real self, and in later life she seemed often to decide to be this or that "Nina" for a while – a recognisable black survival tactic detoured against sleazy promoters, easy audiences and know-nothing hacks. The latter would compare her to Billie Holiday (another stage name) because, well, because they were both BLACK And singing "Whereas, in real terms (of actual learned conservatory skills of phrasing and form) her flexible muscular voice was nearer – as she claimed – to Maria Callas than Billie's sinuously, sinfully slurry jazz.

And in every song or choice of song there seems to come a moment when she and the lyric coincide, and often you may not even notice it but you can be sure she did. In Leonard Cohen's "Suzanne": "And you know that she's half-Cyril/And that's why you want to be there". In "Please Don't Let Me Be Mis/understood": "Sometimes I think I spend the rest of my life/Waiting for someone to tell me 'I've done/But I'm just a soul whose intentions are good...'". She could sing the loneliest song in the world (her reading of The Gals Brothers' "Please Read Me" is as void of consolation as Alex Chilton's "Holoocaust"); or the angriest ("Mr Blacklash – do you think all black people are second class fools? Mr Blacklash – I'm gonna leave you with the blues"); or almost risibly joyous (her awesome transformation of "Suzanne" from neverin dirge into hi-life hallelujah sunrise). She was (rightly) acclaimed as live performer; but her skills as interpreter/oranger are as yet still vastly underplayed. I used to listen (through a glass, darkly) to her take on songs like "Little Girl Blue" and "Read Me" and think this was the saddest sound in the world; but listening to it now, in different times, it sounds like concentrated essence of HOPE to me.

And finally it is that hope that she leaves us – and that you should remember as you pick through the doggy resumes and "unofficial" live sets and dubious Best Of and rediscover her music for the ages on sublime recordings like "I Loves You Porgy" and "Mississippi Goddam" and "Nuff Said" (1968) and Baltimore (1978) and others, for her Song gives us so many places to LIVE, even as she could live it a single place in this world she felt she could call her home.

Maybe she's found one now. □ Nina Simone, singer, pianist, composer, 21 February 1933-21 April 2003

Queen in a stone cold apogee Nina Simone



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CLUB OF CHAOS

Forced into activism in the late 70s by repressive housing policies in Amsterdam, Dutch freedom fighters **The Ex** have spent more than two decades agitating for change by yoking their anarchic punk screwl to free improvisors such as Han Bennink and The ICP Orchestra, as well as crosstalk with avant rockers such as Sonic Youth and Tortoise. Dan Warburton hears how the group have evolved into a tight-knit family that's reached celebrity status in Ethiopia.

Photos: Frank Bauer



Once seen, a live performance by Dutch anarchist punk The Ex is never forgotten. Imagine two men in short pants and army boots, guitars slung loosely over their shoulders, one around the stage like demented dogma cars, backed by a veritable arsenal of precision-honed polyrhythms that surely can't be coming from the slim women at the drums, while upfront, the singer, earnest and unsmiling, croaks the mic like it was a megaphone and declaims his texts with sarcastic fury. The Ex's noise was once described as "pissing all over a wall of sound," but as generic terms go, 'punk' is far too context-specific to describe the music of a group that has pushed the envelope outward to include traditional Eastern European and African folk forms, and whose collaborators with other improving musicians even produce those of a pioneering group such as Sonic Youth.

Amazingly, The Ex have been doing this for a quarter of a century. In 1979, in Wormer, a town on the outskirts of Amsterdam, GW Sok (né Jos Kleij) and Terne Ex (né Hessel) were swept along like thousands of others on a wave of punk enthusiasm. "We were at the same junior high school and kept on seeing each other at gigs," recalls GW Sok, sipping hot coffee in guitarist Andy Moor's sparsely studio flat, a converted schoolhouse in a quiet Amsterdam side street. "The Clash in '77, Sissie and The Barsehans, Gang Of Four, Wire, everyone!" Terne interjects enthusiastically, infected by original punk's DIY spirit, they formed their own group, flipping a coin to determine who did what. GW Sok ended up as the singer, despite having been "rejected even by the school choir," and Terne got to play guitar, even though he had never even held one before. For a name they settled on The Ex because it could be sprayed quickly on walls; plus, Sok wrote all his lyrics in English. "Dutch rock sounds like a contradiction in terms," he snarls. With a couple of friends on bass and drums, they signed up to play at a local punk festival, at which point they realised they had better start practising for real.

Within a year The Ex released their debut EP, *All Corpses Smell The Same* – "Pressed 500, sold 'em all," beams Terne – and album, *Disturbing Domestic Peace*, produced by Dolf Nieuwenhuys, who has worked with the group ever since. Two years later, they followed up with another volley of angry scats, *History Is What's Happening* (1982), which freed off 20 songs in just over half an hour inside a sleeve containing punchy, stark, and sometimes photo depicting prisoners playing music in a concentration camp. Although the new mix, scratchy guitars and skewed Mooney accents of these early records sound charmingly dated today, the originality of Sok's lyrics is already evident in the way they voiced The Ex's unswerving dedication to anarchist causes.

Despite its enduring reputation as something of a liberal hippy paradise with enlightened attitudes towards drugs and sex, Amsterdam back in the late 1970s had more than its fair share of social injustices. When Sok was 16, he was allowed to the city as students in 1978, the housing situation in cities was bad, rent was sky-high and so was unemployment. But there were plenty of buildings kept empty by their owners purely for speculation's sake. Since neither national nor local government were doing anything about it, we got angry and decided to do something about it ourselves." In Wormer, the police operated a particularly heavy-handed policy against disaffected youth – not exclusively punks, Sok hastens to add – squabbling disused factory premises. With their punk revolutionary zeal not about to be contained within hometown limits, the Ex set out into police brutality, among other social inquiries, at home and abroad. They released a single, "Weapons For El Salvador", and appeared with 11 other local groups

on the *Overwoner* compilation album, a landmark release for Dutch punk.

With a tightly knit community of artists, activists and squatters based in Wormer, The Ex evolved a global political outlook indebted to conditions at home, optimised by a fiercely independent attitude to record production and distribution that continues to this day. "We live on the minimum and that's why we can do what we do," explains Terne Hessel. "We have no middleman, no managers and no record companies. We can keep all the back catalogue in print and sell CDs quite cheaply. But income is still related to the number of people who come to gigs and the number of sales we sell." Though the punks in the Netherlands are generally funded, the Ex have scrupulously denied themselves the benefits of playing along with the grant system. "If we did, we'd get lazy," argues GW Sok, "but we need a challenge to make your music." The Ex's principles permeate every level of their music and the business of selling it. In 1988, for instance, they released an album, *Aural Guerrilla*, made artwork designed to be out and folded into cassette box play cards. In defiance of the music industry's "Home Taping Is Killing Music" campaign, the sleeve was emblazoned with the text, "Home Taping Still Saves Money." "People do it anyway," shrugs GW Sok. "When I have tapes of records I really like, I go and buy the real thing," he adds matter-of-factly.

Ex music is as much about information as entertainment. 1987's *Too Many Cowboys* comes with a 36-page booklet featuring articles on diverse subjects close to the group's heart, including Nicaragua, the Animal Liberation Front, the confiscation of Navajo and Hopi lands by the US Government, and the vibrant pirate radio and indie scene in Holland's squat zones. However, their most impressive document in this respect remains the beautifully realised 144-page book of texts and archive photographs accompanying the double 7" 1996 (now reissued in 3" CD format) released in 1986 to commemorate the 50th anniversary of the Spanish Civil War. The discs included The Ex's stirring renditions of the revolutionary songs "El Tren Blindado," "Ay Carmela" and the magnificent raw cry of freedom of "They Shall Not Pass".

With their internationalist outlook, The Ex soon landed into an emerging global network of like-minded anarchists and activists. During one of their UK visits in the 1980s, they played in a factory where they met anarchists who became the group's Chumbawamba. At the height of the ill-fated UK miners' strike in 1984, they toured Holland raising money for strikers' families, and invited miners' children over to Wormer for a holiday. "They'd never seen macaroni before," smiles Terne. They also struck up a solid friendship with The Mekons, particularly Jon Langford, whom they brought over to The Netherlands to produce 1983's *Turnout*. The record's improved sound quality, plus the power drumming of new recruit Saben Witterman, mark *Turnout* out as a landmark Ex release. From the perspective of the UK, it was a landmark. "I got off of Barbed Wire" to the despairing wry scratches of Terne's guitar on "Island Race", it's clear the group were already looking beyond the confines of the straight binary punk single format.

For their tours, meanwhile, Terne bought and converted a bright red fire engine, memories of which trigger a wave of hilarity through the assembled company. "I think we were the only colour in Poland," smiles GW Sok wryly, recalling their mid-80s foray into Eastern Europe. "And in Luxembourg once we drove past a vine line and everyone looked at us as if to say, 'Why don't they come to help?' Eventually our gearbox broke, and it wouldn't go any faster than 30mph. I remember when we followed the sunset driving back home from Germany. For hour upon hour we could see

the sun going down. It was beautiful."

The quintessential Ex sound began to take shape with the arrival of bassist Luc Nissen in 1984. "I wasn't completely into punk," remembers Luc, who left The Ex last year, but *Turnout* blew me away. I was a taxi driver at the time, and one day my cab crossed paths with Terne's van. I wound my window down to tell him how much I enjoyed the new album. Two weeks later I was in the band."

With Saben's departure for France in late 1984, the group set about finding another female drummer. "We liked the idea of it being mixed, not just a boys' thing," GW Sok explains. German-born Kithenne (Kat) Semsfeld, who used to drum in an all-girl punk band Die Drei Musketiere, just also featured her mother, was in Amsterdam when Terne took her number and invited her to join a week later.

With Kat's extraordinary energy and fondness for cowbells, the unmistakable Ex sound was complete. The group's working methods have changed little since, and they're at pains to stress that there's no mystique involved. "Terne or I could bring in a line and Kat would put a drum pattern on top, or vice versa," recalls Luc. "Lyrics always come last." Andy Moor, a guitarist from London who would end up joining the group later, still considers 1985's *Polekheerme* as his favourite Ex album. "It's really raw, the purest version of The Ex, just the quartet: Jos, Terne, Luc and Kat." Sok's sprawling rants about what's-it-same and thimaganagan ("Nurse!" often recall Mark E. Smith, and *Polekheerme* is up there with The Fall's *The Nation's Saviour* Gas as one of the toughest albums of a rough year.

Though *Polekheerme* is punk in its rawest form, the previous year's *Blueprints For A Blackout*, recorded shortly after Luc's arrival, was also a milestone in terms of its considered approach to song form and its old instrumentation, which includes violin, cello, beer crates and old drums. Flirting with several styles, including dub, it opened up a whole series of avenues for potential exploration, most notably an interest in free improvisation that has continued ever since.

"Many of the songs on *Blueprints* were made up on the spot in the studio," recalls GW Sok, while Terne dates the group's interest in improv back to 1983's four single box *Dignity Of Labour*, documenting the rise and fall of a paper mill in Wormer. "We learnt how the factory had been bled dry by the new management, and we used the factory's used asbestos despite the health risk, the plans to close it down, the protests, the closure. We wanted to reflect this, with lyrics culled from interviews we'd done with people who used to work there, and music largely improvised and structured on the spot. We even sneaked into the factory with equipment to play everything there and record an extra track for the environmental natural reverb."

Before he joined The Ex, Luc was already acquainted with the legendary wild man of Dutch improv, Henk Bismark. "He gave this percussion workshop where he turned out with a little bit of a madman," Sok says. He gave us each a box to play with," smiles Luc. "Dead night – if you can't make music with whatever you have to hand, don't bother." In recent years, Bismark has often played with the group, sitting in for Kat when she took time out to have a second child in 1997, and later accompanying them on their recent tour to Ethiopia.

Strong links have also been forged with members of The Instant Composers Pool (ICP), the nameless collective of improvisers originally formed by Bismark, pianist Minnie Kempers and saxophonist Willem Breuker in 1967. ICP began to merge in the 1980s as the difficulties young Dutch free musicians encountered when trying to promote their music, and its founder members were as deeply involved in the politics



The Ex in Amsterdam, The Netherlands, April 1993 (from top): Koenigsmeyer Ex, Terrie Ex and Andy Moor, Rozemaria Ex and GW Sok

surrounding music as they were in their own work. Proceeds from each ICP release were reinvested in the next project. Mengelberg and Bennink (Breuker left in 1973) presiding over a loose, seemingly chaotic, collective structure whose independent, experimental spirit has served as a model for subsequent generations of Dutch musicians, including The Ex. ICP saxophonist Ab Beers and trombonist Walter Werlofs contributed to The Ex's *Jugglers And Smugglers* (1989), which GW Sok describes as "a conscious attempt to incorporate free improvisation into The Ex's approach... We read that Walter wanted to play with The Mekons," he continues, "so we thought we'd look him up." Beers and Werlofs also play on instances. The Ex's 1995 double CD of instrumental improvisations also featuring madcap cellist Tristan Honsinger and percussionist Michael Wichter. This eclectic selection of vignettes features sampled plectrums, biscuit tins, seashells and African djembes, but in a conscious attempt to work within the track time constraints of a rock album — only one of the 32 tracks goes over the four minute mark.

Jugglers charts the history of another Amsterdam squat, the ADM complex, where the group's Koenigsmeyer studio and practice room were located until they were unceremoniously evicted. "We went somewhere else and built another one until we were evicted again," says Terrie. "We did a lot of building." Sok's texts reference a wide range of literary sources, from Franz Kafka to Jacques Prévert via Bertolt Brecht, but still ram the social message home: "Here too troops get sent in against the home population, as easily as anywhere else. Tanks in the street, we know them too. Amsterdam 1980 (Wolfeistraat) and Nijmegen 1981 (Pioniersstraat), remember?" The inclusion of recordings of ADM's sound environment — playgrounds, traffic, barrel organs — serve to locate the record in time and place. "I saw a piece by [Weimannera expressionist painter] Georg Grosz, an article where he described cycling through Berlin, and I transposed that to Amsterdam," comments GW Sok, about one of the album's aspirations. Among the 19 musicians guesting on the album were Lee Ranaldo and Thurston Moore of Sonic Youth. "We met Sonic Youth in 1984 when they were touring Europe supporting PIL," recalls Terrie. "A friend called and asked if I could put them up, as they had no money for a hotel." The two groups' explorations of the fertile territory between punk and improv have been crossing over since, most recently on last year's *In The Fishbowl* CD, a three-way collaboration between The Ex, Sonic Youth and ICP.

A year before *Jugglers*, with Nicolette Schuurman on second guitar, The Ex, once more produced by Langford, recorded *Aural Guerrilla* at Suite Sixteen (formerly Cargo) studios in Rochdale, Lancashire. "We went there because The Fall recorded there," explains GW Sok. At a time when local groups down the road in Maastricht were getting themselves sorted and riding the first waves of Acid House, the raw punk power of the *Aural Guerrilla* tracks would have appeared rather odd to the old studio hands, but the album still packs an awesome punch, from the opening "Headsoke By Numbers", with its welter of stock market statistics spat out with rage by Sok, to the inspired reworking of Peter Hammill's lyrics on "A Motorbike In Africa," Luc and Kot handle the complex metrics of "Welcome To The Asylum" with consummate ease, laying down a rock solid foundation on top of which Terrie's screaming guitar and Sok's hyperventilating harmonica go ballistic.

Andy Moor remembers seeing The Ex live for the first time in Sheffield in 1988, where Terrie's insane cawing about actually made a hole in the stage. "I didn't know much about music until I went to

university in the early 1980s, where I met a guitarist called Colin McLean," he recalls. "He had an enormous collection of jazz records. I remember he asked me if I'd heard Ornette Coleman and I answered, 'Erm, she's supposed to be really good!' He lent me about 150 LPs that summer and that changed everything." When Moor joined McLean, Marion Coutts, Will Plum, Kathy Huime and Ruth Robinson in a collective called Volunteer Slavery (they were all big Roland Kirk fans), he entered a UK anarchist/aquatic scene that included The Ex's old friends Chumbawamba. When Huime and Robinson left, the group evolved into Dog Faced Hermans. Andy says, "We taught ourselves how to play, organize, gigs, release records, set up tours and write songs based on improvisations in rehearsal, in much the same way The Ex's are. Our influences came from all over: Sonic Youth, The Contortions, Don Cherry, ska and African music from Burundi and Nigeria [where Coutts was born], but our biggest musical influences were each other. For me that still applies — the musicians I've played with are those I've learnt the most from."

"We were pretty much ignored by the press and radio, with the exception of John Peel who gave us a session, but we never felt better because we'd built up our own self-sustaining network. Manor's label was fantastic, a bizarre mixture of personal, political, sexual and sometimes incomprehensible rantings." Moor is still in touch with Coutts, now working as a video artist in London, and has provided music for two of her recent installations.

When Dog Faced Hermans moved to Holland in the early 90s and took a year off, Andy hooked up with The Ex for a tour of Russia. On the road the group was listening to a lot of Eastern European and African music. "I can't listen to punk all the time," smiles Kot, beginning to tap into a rich vein of folk and ethnic music that would surface in their music in the decade to come, especially after their encounter with cellist Tom Cora in 1999 (see *The Wire* 230).

"Tom had come to see us at CBGBs in 1989, where they only let you play for 50 minutes before they turn the PA off. He went and argued with them until they turned it back on," Terrie recalls fondly. 1991's *Scrabbling At The Lock* with Cora remains the bestselling Ex album. The tight, irregular metrics of Balkan folk are powered forward by Luc and Kat, while Cora's extraordinary melodic virtuosity is paralleled in Kot's arpeggiating, notably on the Hungarian folk song "Hidogón Fűszek A Székely." Cora's wife Catherine Januarek also adds her spectacular vocal improvisations on several tracks.

Touring extensively with Cora over the next three years (a second album with the cellist, *And The Weatherman Shrug Their Shoulders*, came out in 1993) introduced The Ex's work to a public more familiar with the rarefied worlds of jazz and improvisation. About this time the group members started using "Ex" as their surnames. Had they turned into a sect of some sort? "No, it was just that when we started playing live everyone had full names and we didn't" recalls Kot.

Discovering that their unorthodox guitar work was welcomed enthusiastically by promoters, musicians and this new audience, Terrie and Andy, who joined The Ex full time in 1994, started working as an improvising duet, adding extra players whenever possible. Their appearance with Ben Bennink, Hamid Drake and Ken Vandermark at 2001's Unlimited Festival in Wells is slated for release soon. Meanwhile, Terrie launched his own Terpr imprint in 2000 with a pair of rough and tumble duets, *Heart with Ab Beers* and *The Laughing Owl with Han Bennink*, and more recently has released *Flats* with new Ex bassist Rozemaria Heggen. Meanwhile, Luc's investigations into improv continued with the group Roof, formed in

1999: "I wanted to continue playing with Tom [Corra], and he suggested adding Phil Minton, so I composed 'Mistic Vatcher.' After Corra's death, pianist Vervan Weston stepped into the breach — "One of the most underappreciated musicians in the world," Luc enthuses — and the group became 4 Walls. In 2000 Andy recorded *Louds*, with Kalle Matthews on laptop, for the Unesco imprint he runs with Yannis Kynaides, and has just released *Thema* with saxophonist John Butcher and analogue synth whiz Thomas Lehn. "I was offered a gig in Brussels and asked to choose who I wanted to play with — I immediately thought of the concert promoter who, as Thomas, was my work I don't know at the time. But it worked very well."

Thema is one of the most thrilling Improv outings released so far this year. Moor, like Sonic Youth's Thurston Moore, approaches the guitar from an oblique angle, avoiding the stylings of a Derek Bailey or a John Russell — both ultimately rooted in jazz — and his background in hard driving rock means he has no qualms about laying down the odd motorik riff, drawing Butcher and Lehn into a veritable electrical storm of hard blowing bluffs, zaps and fizzes. Andy and Terrie's boisterous no-fills attitude is a welcome shot in the arm to European Improv at a time when it threatens to atrophy into virtuosic little cliques each with its own dogmatic agenda, and recalls the arrival in the late 1970s of improvisors from a rock background such as Fred Frith, which opened the floodgates to a rich spate of activity in the subsequent decade.

Improv is just one of many paths the group and its individual members have explored. In 1995, after touring with Jaap Blom's Baastael, they invited Schematis vocalists Bunn to bring his guff (Bunn gives us live recordings on 1996's *Musical Shivers*, which also includes a memorable reading of "House Carpenter"), a song that featured on the Harry Smith Anthology of American Folk Music sung by Clarence Ashley in 1930.

Individual group members were being increasingly drawn to ever more disparate styles of playing. Kat met Czech violinist Iva Bittová (they toured as a duo last year), Sok hooked up with a punk-folk group called De Kift, and Andy teamed up with Estonian guitarist Leonid Soybelman and The Necks rhythm section Joe Williamson and Tony Buck to form the klezmerous quartet Red, whose 1998's *Red* was released on John Zorn's Tzadik label. "I met Leonid and his group Ne Zhdai when he Ex toured Russia in 1990. It was great fun playing fucked-up electric guitar versions of old Eastern European folk and klezmer, very fresh and chaotic. Later we introduced some Greek rembetika songs and Leonid sang more in Russian. We would have played more often, if we hadn't all been busy with our other bands," he sighs.

Meanwhile, Terrie and his girlfriend were on a trip round the world that took up most of 1996. In a dry aside? "No, an ambulatory" he roars. "We drove down the west side and up the east side." Particularly impressed with Ethiopia, he took advantage of his visit to prepare the ground for The Ex's tour of the country six years later.

Though their interest in non-European culture can be dated back to a split '79 in 1984 with the Iraqi Kurdish group *Awara*, recent years have seen an explosion of Ex collaborations with, among others, Japanese dancer Hisako Horikawa, Senegalese conga player Serge and the Congolese group Konono. Terrie discovered Ethiopian singer Tefnyahu Beraki living in Rotterdam, penniless and depressed. "She was a really big star in the 1970s, but she only released a few 7"s. I built her a knee (five-string) harp, and put her in contact with the guy who released *Ethiopian*

Volume 5, on which Beraki features." A double CD of her music is due out shortly in Tem.

In January 2002 The Ex embarked on the long-awaited trip to Ethiopia, a voyage of discovery lovingly documented on their Website. "We had a paper typed out saying we could play anywhere we wanted and we showed it to the Chief of Police in each village," Andy explains. Of their eight concerts, each of which featured four songs in Amharic sung by Kat (on which Han Bennink squatted the drum stool), the most memorable was in Bahar Dar. After driving around all afternoon announcing the gig by megaphone, they were dismayed to find they'd only sold five tickets (at about £1 each). Rostering the concert for the next day, the played in the square in front of the theatre... to 5000 ecstatic Ethiopians (another free gig in Gondar a couple of days later drew a huge crowd). By the time they left the country, "State Of Shock", Scrabbling At The Lock's opening track and the closest the group have come to a bona fide hit record, was blasting out of local Tej-Bets (honeywine bars). Not surprisingly, the group intend to return to the region (Entire last year, Ethiopia in early 2004).

Recording remains a priority for the group, and when an opportunity presented itself to work in Steve Albini's Electrical Audio in Chicago, they seized it. Albini is an Ex fan of long standing: he once cited their 1983 12" *Gonna Rob The Spembank* as an all time favourite, and even helped them carry their gear on stage at that CBGBs gig in 1989. Nine years later, established in his custom-built studios, the group took full advantage of the situation to produce one of their finest albums to date, *Starters Alternators*. A second Albini-produced album, *Dazy Spells*, was recorded in France in 2000.

"Steve doesn't like being called a producer," Moor continues. "He hardly uses any effects. Most of the work is in the recording. He insisted that the walls of one room at Electrical Audio be made out of soundproofed adobe brick, for perfect acoustics. I remember once I must have nudged the mic about three inches and he came downstairs to move it back. I thought, 'How did he know it had moved?'"

"He does the EQing by using different microphones," adds Terrie. "We recorded *Starters* in five days, with only two days mixing." He's working day and night," says Kat. "Unbelievable." Albini and his group Shereid did, however, take time off to play The Ex's 20th anniversary bash in Amsterdam's Paradiso a year later.

Returning to the States in 1999, The Ex played seven shows with Fugazi and released their first in *The Fishtank* collaboration on Konkurrent, which partnered them with Tortoise. On paper, a meeting between the Chicago group's palladian chamber rock and The Ex's jagged avant punk would seem to be fraught with problems, but after two days of experimenting in the studio, their sheer incompatibility threw up some extraordinary music, notably "Central Highway," which sounds like late 50s Miles jamming Ben Monder's *Electric Blue*. A further US tour was aborted when The Ex's plane turned round halfway across the Atlantic. It was 11 September. "We were flying to Texas when that happened," recalls Andy. "I remember Terrie waking me up and saying: 'We're going back home...'"

In 2000, The Ex was invited by the Holland Festival to produce a work for 20 piece big band, The Ex Orkest. "We were originally invited to play in Zepp's 2000 Motel, but we got out of that," recalls Andy. Instead, the group, with some help from Joost Baas, arranged choiceworthy music from The Ex book catalogue, as well as an extraordinary version of Alexander Moscovitz's 1926 orchestral constructivist noise masterpiece, *The Iron Foundry*. The resulting album, *Exn Orkest Holland*, features assorted Ex alumni

including Blom, Buhr, Wierbos and Vicher. What started as a one-off project has evolved as a touring outfit, perhaps the only regularly working large ensemble in Europe to integrate free improvisation within a rock framework. Perforists might again be drawn by The ICP Orchestra, but whereas their seemingly chaotic proceedings are cunningly (dis)organised by Misha Mengelberg, and remain firmly rooted in jazz, an Ex Orkest performance requires extensive rehearsal and organisation. "If you're working with strong characters, you need discipline to get the music out," explains Luc. "Freedom should be within limits."

Luc's decision to leave the collective last year threw the musicians into an intense period of soul-searching. "We talked about it for eight months," sighs Terrie. "For me it's still mysterious. He never said what he wanted to do." Luc explains patiently later: "When you leave a band it's taken as being critical of the band, but it's not that — I just had several reasons for feeling I couldn't go on any further." Not that all ties have been definitively severed — his office at Konkurrent is directly under Andy's studio, and the two have recently performed together with Mistic Vatcher and Senegalese singer Mal Syla in Groningen. He's also busy touring with 4 Walls... and building four walls himself. "I'm building my own house, because I don't have enough money to pay anyone else to do it," he explains, adding with a grin: "But I like doing it too."

Fortunately a new bassist was at hand, in the form of Rosemarie Heggen, a classically trained New Music virtuoso who had played in The Ex Orkest and jumped at the chance of leaving a secure chair in the prestigious New Ensemble to board The Ex's tourbus. In a baptism of fire typical of The Ex, her first gig found her jamming along with Congolese musicians Konono. Terrie recalls: "Back in Congo they usually play ten hours in a row, building up gradually. So we played first Minguidi, their 70 year old leader, though we were playing traditional Dutch music. In the end we overplayed. We tried to play a Konono song, and they joined in once. Minguidi was singing all our songs in the van driving back after the gig! Of course, we had no in-depth knowledge of the traditions behind their music, but it sounded great."

"I was attracted to the idea of playing with The Ex because I knew I would be free as a bird," confirms Rosemarie, who also played with the Ex in Europe when the interview took place. "Playing punk on an acoustic base is a challenge, it has to be loud and sound good. I like to use the bow a lot, so I've tried out lots of pickups and preamps." No question of her having to compete with Luc by learning the old repertoire either. As Jos explains: "Every time somebody new joins, we start from scratch again." In the last two and half months the group has rehearsed its new set no fewer than 46 times. "It's a completely new band!" says Terrie, enthusiastic as ever. "I often wonder where else I could find such freedom and freedom!" adds Kate.

Did Terrie and Jos ever imagine back in 1979 that they would still be together a quarter of a century later? "I'm surprised, considering how I thought in 1979," Jos replies, calmly. "You couldn't imagine a band lasting so long. Of course, I find it painful every time a new year starts that we haven't learnt anything from the past. But good things are happening locally. If you're a decent, friendly person it affects people in the end. That works better than a big pile of paper with lots of slogans. There's always a new project. Every year, every release is new. You never look back." □ Andy Moor's *Thema* with John Butcher and Thomas Lehn is available now on Unsounds (www.unsounds.com). Information on The Ex catalogue is on their Website: www.theex.nl



THE NEW SEEKERS

Yo La Tengo's quest to shift the rock music they love into other dimensions in music has led the New Jersey trio into fruitful collaborations with the cream of the East Coast free jazz scene. In New York, David Keenan hears the tale of their 15 year evolution and their monstrous appetite for brain frying sound.

Photos: Chris Buck



In the shadow of New York's Brooklyn Bridge, on the concourse of what just might be the greatest ice cream parlour in the world, Yo La Tengo bassist, Dump Mannheim and all-around post-cultural sump James McNew is reciting the stations of his teenage epiphany. "I grew up in Charlottesville, Virginia," he starts. "I liked Metal and punk rock and I read *Creem* magazine from an early age. It was brain frying stuff. Brain frying. It took me so long to figure out what their plan was, which was to have big pictures of Dave Lee Roth on the front then a Pore Ubu! feature inside. What really tipped me off was I had an English teacher who spotted me reading *Creem* and then told me that her husband, Robert A Hull – also Robert Hull – wrote reviews for it." She said she would bring me some records and one day she turned up with a copy of The Velvet Underground's *White Light/White Heat* and the original Nuggets compilation. "He breaks from his monologue to mime the top of his head exploding, constellations of skull tracking silent arcs through space. 'I was like – thank you. So long! I wasn't being paying attention to your class ever again, Brain frying stuff. That completely ruined me for the rest of my life. At that point not only did I stop paying attention to schoolwork, I tossed out any idea of taking lessons. Fuck it, I knew enough to do what I wanted to do. Yet somehow I never really believed I could do it for a living because rock musicians were handsome and weren't from Virginia. Sure, I'm handsome, but I don't look like the average skinny guy playing rock music. Then, when I saw The Minutemen, he checked everything, I saw [vocalist and guitarist] D Boon. He looked like me and he was pogging! Look at him go! That was the most interesting part of my entire life. It was like, what am I waiting for? I immediately started writing songs and recording. I finally had proof that it was possible. Brain frying stuff."

The very existence of Yo La Tengo, which for the past ten years has been made up of James McNew, guitars/vocalist, Ira Kaplan and drummer/vocalist Georgia Hubley, is testimony to the possibilities for reinvention and liberation inherent in the most forward thinking rock music.

Over a seafood platter at an oversubscribed restaurant in New York's Greenwich Village (Yo La Tengo live their food), Kaplan picks up the thread. "I always tend to look at the development of the band from a more personal angle," he states. "For me a lot of it is to do with getting over shyness and fear. I was so shy that it was impossible to do what I wanted to do, to play in a band. Then I met Georgia at a Beatles concert and she was a motivating factor in letting me feel that I could actually make music. I felt comfortable enough with her that I could reveal myself, and I think she did too. Now I could point to almost every record we've made and say what I thought we got a little braver about. To me the changes from record to record more reflect the courage to do this and the courage to do that."

Summer Sun, the new Yo La Tengo album, is a beautiful case in point, a set that sees the group completely rein in their more prolix tendencies, cutting back on the kind of post-Lou Reed ostentatious guitar and

extended jamming that bolsters much of their back catalogue. Whereas on previous records the vocals were always semi-submerged in pots of tonal colour, here all three players' voices are pushed a little more to the fore with lyrics that are for the most part actually discernible, while the group's lugubrious songforms are extrapolated into other dimensions with the addition of a fistful of New York's premier free jazz renegades: trumpeter Roy Campbell Jr, saxophonists Daniel Carter and Sabir Mateen, and bassist William Parker. The album title itself is a red herring, with the emotional weight of tracks like "Little Eyes," a charging electro-hymn half sung, half spoken by Hubley, a world away from the kind of euphoric beach party that *Summer Sun* immediately hints at. Rather, the album's mood more closely lines up with such exquisitely doleful records as The Beach Boys' *Surf's Up* and Neil Young's *On The Beach*, where the end of summer stands as a metaphor for everything that passes and is gone. It's an album that gives up little on the first few spins, the sort of recording that repays time spent living in it.

"Forget the title," says Hubley. "The title didn't even enter the picture until later in the game – we had a whole other title that we couldn't use. We don't really know what this record would be like. It kind of took us by surprise. We didn't think it was as melancholy or as close to the last record as it was, even while we were making it." The last record, 2000's sparse *And Then Nothing Turned Itself Inside-Out*, was the group's first attempt to expand their vocabulary beyond the ethos of guitar-oversaturated pop songs, a process that was first seeded during the final studio sessions for 1997's *I Can Hear The Heart Beating As One*.

"We still do the jamming stuff live," Kaplan asserts. "It's not like it's not there, but there was a point during *I Can Hear The Heart Beating As One*, on the song 'Moby Octopus' where I was going to go and record the guitar overdub and I just did the thing that everyone knew I would do, which was some kind of more thing. I said, 'This doesn't seem right, this is supposed to be a startling moment and instead it's so much what everyone would expect from our record.' It wasn't doing what we wanted it to do, so I came up with this piano part which I think is a lot more startling, and really from that moment on I've been trying to challenge myself to play the guitar in other ways, even though technically I'm massively limited."

The confidence to up-anchor and take the sound somewhere entirely unexpected was given further impetus by the group's immersion in New York's free jazz scene, beginning in 1999 with the double 7" collaboration with Sabir Mateen and Other Dimensions in Music. Now 2000/Excelsior 2001 (Egon 1999).

"When we made the Fakebook album for Bar/None in 1991, Steve Joerg, who now runs [the New York free jazz label] ADM Fidelity, worked there," Kaplan explains. "We've known him a long time. So when we wanted to do the 7" I asked Steve if he could recommend players who he thought would be receptive to what we were doing. He had written these songs, these fake jazz songs – or maybe they were real – and

we thought, well, if we're fake jazz musicians, would it work if we played them with people who knew what they were doing, people who wouldn't resent us or treat us like dilettantes? So Joerg suggested the Other Dimensions in Music guys."

Other Dimensions in Music have been one of the principal anchor points for the spirit of 1960s free music, keeping the flame burning through decades of committed collective activity, harnessing both the music's cosmic aspirations and its love of righteous protest. For the double single, *Yo La Tengo* were joined by the group's Daniel Carter, Roy Campbell Jr and Sabir Mateen across four sides of whistled Aristotelian boogie, with Kaplan, Hubley and McNew riffing off the blasts of brass with rollicking percussion and the alumn of an electric organ. Following on from these initial experiments, they recruited free percussionist Susie Barra to provide some temporal levity on *And Then Nothing Turned Itself Inside-Out*. But it wasn't until they had begun enreing *Summer Sun* that they decided to fully incorporate an extended jazz section into the group's ranks.

"We played with the Other Dimensions guys a bunch over the last few years," McNew relates. "We had played shows with them where they played as members of our group, playing on our own songs with live instruction. They'd find a place, mood or colour to add to the songs. It really got us thinking about how these songs could be interpreted. I was really intimidated at first, for the most part I'm confident as a musician but I have to admit I was nervous in this case, those guys are heavyweight. The opportunity was definitely there for me to push myself out of doing it. But it couldn't have been any more different. They weren't concerned at all about the technical achievements of the people they were playing with. They were more interested in involving themselves in the moment of what we were doing and adapting and communicating within that. That was a really revelatory experience, and amazing to think we could communicate with musicians of that calibre. We did a set about six months ago for our Hanukkah show at Maxwell's, and this time William Parker stayed on stage with us as well. Obviously when he's onstage with you, you try not to play bass so much, so I stuck mostly to percussion. We had finished *Summer Sun* but hadn't mixed it and during soundcheck we suddenly thought that we should really capitalise on playing with these guys. We did two or three of the songs from *Summer Sun* that night. They all played so beautifully when it was presented to them out of the blue, so we booked time a week later and they knocked it all out in one day."

Despite the overwhelming gravitational force generated by Parker and co., Yo La Tengo were able to retain the integrity of their sound and material across the whole of the session, fully integrating the fluid spume of freedom into their precisely constructed pop songs. Parker's bass is put to particularly elastic use, with the group cutting it up into sections and treating it with a thick pat of effects. On "Don't Have To Be So Sad" the players set up aquatic washes of guitar

Yo La Tengo (left to right): Georgia Hubley, Ira Kaplan, James McNew



"MY TEACHER GAVE ME COPIES OF WHITE LIGHT/WHITE HEAT AND THE ORIGINAL NUGGETS COMPILATION. I WAS LIKE – THANK YOU! SO LONG! I WON'T BE PAYING ATTENTION TO YOUR CLASS EVER AGAIN. BRAIN FRYING STUFF"

through which they drop little ripples of piano and shuffling electronics that Parker spotlights with a tactile pulse, capped by almost subliminal puffs from the horns of Carter, Maaten and Campbell. "Let's Be Still" moves furthest into the path of the brass section, with Parker locked into a dusty groove that Hubley exaggerates into an emaciated take on *On the Corner* funk while Maaten and Carter tongue spurts of flute.

"It was almost a condition of going into the collaboration that we wanted them to play on our record and not vice versa," Kaplan insists. "If we could integrate them in a way that it still felt like us, then great. Still, we didn't direct them too much. As an example of how free they were, on 'Let's Be Still' we didn't even know what instruments they were going to play. We didn't instruct them to play flute, we just said 'play,' and both Daniel and Sabir picked up flutes. I was shocked, it wasn't what I expected but we wanted to trust them to play it the way they heard it. If we hadn't liked it we might have said something but it was great. It's always exciting to find out how they hear our material."

Clearly, both Kaplan and Hubley — now husband and wife — have come a long way from the early parties and practice room blowouts where they first cut their teeth behind closed doors, still too nervous to play in front of anyone but themselves. Kaplan can claim they first met at a gig by New Jersey art punks The Feebles but McNew has been prey to several conflicting creation myths. "I know stories and hear the occasional reminiscence," he reveals. "Another story is that they met at a Soft Boys show in NYC. It was at some club that was really snooty, the kind of place where Georgia would go but his thought was too pushy. I remember them butting heads over that kind of stuff. I was always entertained by those arguments."

Prior to their meeting, Kaplan had been writing for *The New York Rocker*, a now wave magazine founded by Alan Betrock that also covered fringe currents such as free jazz. But then Kaplan was the archetypal frustrated journalist, secretly pining to be a rock star. Hubley, meanwhile, had grown up in uptown Manhattan. Her father, John Hubley, had been a director of animation at Disney, painting layouts for *Snow White* and *Fantasia*, before he walked out during an industrial dispute. Following the split, he helped found UPA, the company that invented the cartoon character Mr. Magoo, among others. During the McCarthy era he was blacklisted for his membership of the Communist Party and was forced to work in commercials, where he wouldn't receive an on-screen credit. However, his later career brought considerable success when, together with his wife Faith, he went on to conceive a string of Academy Award winning short films. John often used improvised dialogue from his children on the soundtracks of his films, and Georgia's voice appears on 1993's *Windy Day* and 1997's *Cockaboo*. He was also one of the first artists — alongside the visionary film maker and architect Harry Smith — to combine animation with flights of improvised jazz, and players like Dizzy Gillespie were regulars around the Hubley household while Georgia was growing up. "I met Dizzy many times," she recalls. "He was pretty crazy, a wild one."

Although at first Hubley was more interested in following in her parents' footsteps, enrolling in art school and working for a time in animation, the advent of punk rock blew all of that out the window. Before hooking up with Kaplan, she played as part of a punk-influenced bass and drums duo alongside Wire contributor Byron Coley.

"Meeting Ira was important," Hubley asserts. "When we started playing together it was for laughs, we couldn't play but it was fun, doing covers, and it just grew from there. Ira and I had very similar tastes and there's definitely a nervousness that we share, we were nervous to play with each other at first, a couple of shy people coming out of their shells. At the beginning there wasn't much of a concept, we were just drawn to things that we liked to listen to, lots of 60s and garage music, especially in the early 80s with the garage revival. It's easy to play, so it's the sort of thing that's instantly gratifying because it almost sounds immediately like what you're trying to get it to sound like: two chords, basic drumbeat."

Yo La Tengo played their first gig at the offices of *The New York Rocker* sometime in 1983, running through adrenalectomized cover versions of material like "Headin' For The Texas Border" by The Flamin' Groovies. From the moment they formed, the duo was in a constant state of flux. For *Rico The Tiger*, their 1986 debut, Kaplan and Hubley called on their friend Dave Schramm for lead guitar, while bass duties were split between Dave Rick, Mike Lewis and Mission Of Burma's Clint Conley, who also produced the session.

"Going back to that first record, Dave Schramm was an amazing guitarist," Kaplan relates. "And I know we were hiding behind him to a certain degree." Nevertheless, it's a thrilling bluff, with Schramm's guitar set to explode across a set of primitively rendered power punk ballads and 60s pop covers like The Kinks' "Big Sky" and Love's "A House Is Not A Motel".

"Dave Rick was our first bass player and he said at the time he was going to form his own band and eventually he did, he put together Phantom Tootboots," Kaplan expands. "Dave Schramm also left. All our members were, at best, one foot in and one foot out but we thought things were working out fine that way. When we released *President Yo La Tengo* in 1989, that wasn't even a record made by a group, it had two songs from a live session, something left over from another session, two different bassists, but we were really happy with how it worked. After that we thought, well, maybe we don't have to operate as a real band after all. However, once we met James we realised just how uncomfortable we had really been about not having a regular group."

After McNew's brain frying brush with the furthest gonzoed reaches of *Green* magazine and his epiphany encounter with *The Mutemans*, he set out to document the first tentative strings of the muse across a batch of caresses recorded under the name *Dump*, a guise he still operates under today. He was also involved in publishing his own fanzine, *And Suddenly*, and in his guise as a zine editor he first made contact with Michael Cadogan and Liz Cox of the

Boston group Christmas. "I saw Christmas and Yo La Tengo live within a week of each other," he recalls. "I had no idea that 15 years later I'd be telling the story. President Yo La Tengo had just come out and I loved that record, he was playing crazy freakout guitar, about five songs across the whole set. I remember liking it a lot." In the event McNew hooked up with Christmas during their ill-fated dalliance with IRS Records, who sat on their third and final album, *Vortex*, and eventually dropped the group from the label. It was during this hiatus that McNew first met up with Kaplan and Hubley over dinner (inevitably) with their friends Cox and Cadogan.

"At dinner they mentioned they had a tour booked but weren't sure who would be playing with them," McNew recalls. "Through a mouthful of food I said, 'Oh, I'll do it.' They called me two days later and asked if I was serious. I said, 'Sure'. So I would drive down from Providence to NYC on weekends to practise for them. We did that five or six times and went on tour, two weeks in the US and three weeks alongside Eleventh Dream Day in Europe. It was the most exciting time I ever had. I'd never been out of the country, never been anywhere near it. I wound up moving to NY and I just kept showing up at practice. I think they just hadn't figured out a way to get rid of me." Although the first album McNew cut with the band was 1992's *May I Sing With Me*, that record feels more like a clearing of the boards than a new beginning. Rather, it was 1993's *Painful* that was the first "real" Yo La Tengo record, and the one that first flagged them as potential heirs to the downtown crown of The Velvet Underground, a position they've since cemented with their appearance as The Velvets in Mary Harron's 1996 movie about the life of Valerie Solanas, *I Shot Andy Warhol*.

The new sound was dominated by banks of juddering organ, lethargic phased guitar, minimal thudding percussion and vocals that sounded like the last gasps of someone drowning. The title *Painful* hints at the kind of barfing pains involved in the whole exercise, with the group wrestling with a new sonic blueprint in the midst of legal hassles with their former label. "For me *Painful* is definitely our first real record," Kaplan confirms. "One of the big things for me was having James in the group and knowing that he actually wanted to be there. That meant a lot. James happens to be frighteningly talented but that doesn't matter. He was inept that wouldn't matter either. Personally-wise we meshed, and that's why something good came out of it. We utilized what he was good at, but we would have done that regardless of what his particular talent actually was."

With this line-up in place, Yo La Tengo became a magnet for the many warped manifestations of leftfield popular culture, attracting wildcard collaborators that ranged from The Kinks' Ray Davies, Ronnie Spector and David Grubbs (all guests at various live shows), to director Hal Hartley (they've appeared on the soundtrack to two of his movies, and he's directed a video promo in return) and The Simpsons (they recorded a psychedelic version of the title theme). In turn, their annual shows at Hanukkah, the late November Jewish festival, have become

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legendary for their drawing power. "David Byrne sat in for one show too," Keaton states. "Because [by Hanukkah] we like to do lots of songs written by Jews so we got David Byrne to sing 'Love Comes In Spurts' by Richard Hell. We got The Sun Ra Arkestra to come and play as well. A couple of them did 'Nuclear War' with us that night, then we played in Philadelphia and we put out an open invitation to anyone who wanted to set in with us from The Arkestra. We got three members who played about half the set with us, Danny Thompson, Tyrone Hill and Dave Davis. At the soundcheck we ran through seven songs and winged three more for the encore. It was so great, we asked them to DC and they came to NYC as well, three times."

Yo La Tengo's recording of "Nuclear War," Sun Ra's eschatological street rap from 1982, took it into last winter's *Billboard* Top Ten, lending it the hit single status that Sun Ra had long prophesied. More recently they've been working with Yoko Ono on a tribute to John Mitchell and Stephen Trask's *Herwig And The Angry Inch* (2001), a cult film which was previously a rock musical. As McIwew succinctly puts it: "The line between fantasy and reality has taken a consistent pounding throughout our career."

"All these projects just sort of reflect our personalities and what happens in our collective brain," he expands. "We love all those things and we could probably talk about any of them at length. Sometimes it's really weird, though. We spent a lot of time working on the Ray Davies project for our Hanukkah show and then during a lunch break it suddenly dawned on me: I'm eating a sandwich with Ray Davies. Holy shit! But it's funny that while we're working we're ourselves, doing what we do, not outwardly terrified, confident that we're there for a reason, to be ourselves. I felt that way when we made an album with Jad Fair, even though I was in awe and had worshipped him my whole life."

Above all, Yo La Tengo still operates as fans, as a back catalogue stuffed to the ears with wacky cover versions attests to. They take rock at its word, moulding its forms to more closely reflect and complement their innate awkwardness, in the process birthing a hybrid that stays true to the various personal idiosyncrasies of the players while enjoying a unique, tangential relationship with the rock canon.

"That's what I love about all those American Song-Poem recordings that studio hacks made to order in the 60s and 70s," Keaton says, referring to recently unearthed recordings of execrable amateur lyrics set to song by professional studio musicians. "Those are amazing. Those guys were not rock musicians, but that's the language of the times and because their mission was to do stuff as commercially as possible they had to take it on board. So those recordings present a particularly warped take on that whole culture. The idea of rock music played by non-rock musicians is so weirdly revealing and personal. It's kind of like what we're doing with free jazz and our idea of 'free jazz'. It's sincere but we're not pretending that we come from that."

And in those first few brave steps towards previously unexplored tonal vistas, whole new universes are born. ☐ Summer Sun is out now on Matador

THEATRE OF WAR



After running away to Europe from Argentina in 1957, composer Mauricio Kagel found a role as the imp poking fun at the dogmatic approach of the New Music establishment characterised by Stockhausen and Boulez. In a rare interview, classical music's black sheep tells Philip Clark about a lifetime of subversion, and how he foresaw the last year's hostage siege in a Moscow theatre.

Photos: Frank Baser



Black mark against my name? Yes, and I worked very hard to get it! Musurico Kigel complains with an impenetrable grin, as we sit in the book-lined snug of Amsterdam's Ambassade Hotel. Kigel was born in Buenos Aires in 1931, to an Argentine-Jewish family with strong left wing views. He was reborn in 1957, when he decided to escape from a Perón regime that insisted its state composers conform to a rigid, dry neoclassical style. The irresistible pull of the Central European New Music scene prompted his relocation to Cologne, Germany, at a crucial moment in the development of post-war contemporary music: In Darmstadt, Karlheinz Stockhausen and Pierre Boulez were on the one hand, and John Cage and himself, rather than adapting with notes on paper, out of a desire to instigate a musical Year Zero. Finding it pure and self-important, Kigel roundly rejected the hardline Darmstadt doctrine. Instead he set about undoing musical tradition and polluting modernist idealism, which makes him a kind of soothsayer for postmodernism. The previous year, his contemporary György Ligeti had also wound up in Cologne after fleeing the Soviet tanks sent in to crush Hungary's 1956 uprising. The two refugees found they shared a more tolerant and less dogmatic vision of modernism.

"There were some European composers at this time who viewed me as a fugitive bird from Argentina that they wanted to shoot out of the sky," Kigel continues, "but I was immediately friendly with Ligeti, and we have always shared an interest in one another's work. There is this way in which we have different positions and aesthetics. The only thing I ask is that the result has to be interesting, if somebody tells me that they want to produce boring music as a philosophical point of view then I accept it – but the boringness must be exciting."

Kagel is in Amsterdam to premier his new *Doppelsteift* (Double Stuffed), played by the Soerenberg Ensemble under conductor Reinbert de Leeuw. The Dutch music scene has long regarded Kagel as one of its own, and he's built an enduring reputation as a composer and conductor of avant-garde musicians. Not to mention with the Ambassade Hotel, which has traditionally welcomed maestros and auteurs. Kagel, however, smells a rat. As his eyes scan the surrounding shelves – which carry authors as diverse as Umberto Eco (another Ambassade regular) and blockbuster novelist Leslie Thomas – he deliriously points out that the books look like they're new, and new music is in the air, too. Kagel has long thrived on unpacking the often perplexity this divide between science and truth.

In a musical century dominated by Impressionism, serialism, minimalism, totalitarianism and postmodernism, Kagel has sidestepped 'isms' altogether. Instead he has doggedly interrogated modern music and its relationship to tradition. He has drawn on his background in musical theatre, coaching singers at the Teatro Colón in Buenos Aires, to radicalise and disrupt the concert experience, while offering a critique on its performance conventions and rituals. Targeting the corrupting nature of institutions or vested interests is more important to Kagel the satirist and pasticheur than advancing a personal political agenda. Musically and politically, his vision can be summed up as anti-dominant, suggesting that fertile and stimulating ideas in the field of music – and by extension society at large – are trampled on by protocol and spin. Being a composer not a politician, Kagel frames his anti-establishment tendencies as musical discourse.

Although the bulk of his pieces are conceived for conventional classical forces, Kagel has never been afraid to question the grip of the score on Western art music. Unimpressed by the navel-gazing tendency prevalent in electronic music, Kagel instead embraces

new technologies as expressive media in their own right. His Fluxus-style one-off compositions and happenings have introduced extramusical elements such as coffee grinders, wall-kettles and electric fans; 'chromatic games' for light sources, tapes, etc. (Carrera Oscura, 1965); a 'score' which is actually a filmed collage of Beethoven motifs (Ludwig Vloe, 1970). Film and pieces conceived for radio form a significant part of his output. In these works, Kagel often turns his penetrating gaze on the global village and its responses to media messages. Kagel attacks the PR machinery of party politics in *Der Zibon* (1981), and the hold of organised religion in his stage work *Die Religionen der Welt* (1984). His pluralist philosophy, he suggests, owes much to his formative experiences in Argentina, while his status as an outsider in German musical life allows him to take a critically detached view of the avant garde milieu in which he landed.

The intellectual life of late 1930s and early 40s Buenos Aires, Kagal explains, was akin to the New York of the 1960s. Film, theatre, literature and philosophy were as much a part of his artistic awakening as music. The movie *Splash* of Laurel and Hardy, Buster Keaton and Charlie Chaplin was easily in his vocabulary. He studied at 17th century philosophers such as Spinoza, the English Literature professor at Buenos Aires's Colegio Libre was the crown prince of magic realism, Jorge Luis Borges, and although Kagal believes the influence of Borges's narrative labyrinths on his own music has been merely 'subliminal', his awe at Borges's virtuosic analysis of Reality and the Unreality of Time in *The Aleph* and *The Tension* remains undiminished. Kagal's musical experiences were formed by his local New Music society in Buenos Aires and later by his work as a vocal coach at the Teatro Colón. Through the New Music society he got to gauge his own formative efforts against the works of established figures like Soriano, Paganini, Debussy and Bartók. Meanwhile, his experiences working at the opera house convinced him that art could also be absurd.

Kagel's most radical deconstruction of operatic convention is his plotless *Staatstheater* (*National Theatre*), completed in 1970. In one scene called "Repertoire", performers mime semi-jokes and purposefully banal gestures designed to puncture a hole in the pomp of grand operatic fanfares and egos. "I was very near to the birth of places when I was working at the Teatro Colón and I learnt how theatre functions, but also how theatre doesn't function," Kagel explains. "Staatstheater was commissioned by the Hamburg Opera, but I think calling it an 'anti-opera' is too easy. It's a deconstructed opera – written before deconstruction became fashionable – or perhaps an 'opera-puzzle'. In one scene, each singer is dressed in the role of a different opera. However, they are singing my music, and the result is visualisation of opera's past. You might see Macbeth on stage, but what he sings has nothing to do with [Verdi's] Macbeth, and therefore the counterpoint between hearing, knowing and seeing works on a very complex level."

Since its first production, Staatstheater has only been revived in its complete form four times. Perhaps opera companies find its subversive implications dangerously revealing. Certainly, Staatstheater exposes the opera establishment's current vogue for adapting novels like *The Handmaid's Tale* or *Sophie's Choice* as the desperate last stand of a form that's mislaid its relevance. Ughs has readily acknowledged the influence of Kegel on his own self-described "anti-opera" *Le Grand Macabre*, even though he had already deconstructed the theatrical gesture himself in two works, *Aventures* and *Nouvelles Aventures*, which predate Staatstheater. Otherwise Helmut

Lachenmann's late 1990s masterpiece *Das Mädchen Mit Dem Schwefelholz* (see *The Wire* 228) is one of the few recent works with courage enough to fully develop Staatsoper's provocative stance.

The subsequent neglect of Staatsrechner has not deterred Kappel from following the impulses of his unique theatrical imagination. Probe (1971) has no performers at all, only a theatre director who indicates how the audience might interact with props like spotlights, microphones and loudspeakers. Other pieces have incorporated stagehands (Unzug), acrobats (Variété), gymnasts (Ex-Position) and even 111 cyclists (A Breeze) into the action. When Kappel was working at the Cologne Opera, he was amused to notice during the dress rehearsal how the conductor directed the rehearsal pianist as though he was a full orchestra. Their decant became the starting point for *Aus Deutschland* (From Germany, 1977-80).

"The sight of a conductor conducting a solo piano was surreal," laughs Kagel, "and I decided to do a piano opera. Other instruments join at the end, but the piano is always present. Sometimes there is one piano, sometimes two, and at one point the piano is offstage. The subject of *Aus Deutschland* is Romanticism, and I find the fact that the Romantic impulse has never stopped very interesting. I am a child of the 12-tone age, but even expressionism is a neurotic extension of Romanticism. And in 19th century Lieder [art songs] the idea of blurring the edges between male and female has always seemed to me to be remarkably modern. Most Lieder of Schumann, Schubert and Brahms can be sung by either male or female singers, and suddenly the object [the loved one] is not interesting, but the fact that he is singing that he's in love. It's an androgynous statement, and not important whether he is singing to a male or a female. I thought about how I could build a theatrical piece that played with these tender roles."

The structure of *Aus Deutschland* displays Kagel at his most subtle. The images and subjects of different *Lieder* are fused into a few flowing sequences, and the sources themselves are buried at a subterranean level within the overall construct. While other composers might drop musical references as a crowd-pleasing ploy, there's nothing remotely ingratiating in Kagel's use of quotation. "Relating ideas to tradition but then starting again from the beginning provides me with a lot of creative energy and possibility for inventiveness," says Kagel. "There is an empty space, and in this space I am putting the remains of music. This is quite different from accumulating music as quotation, and in a composition I consider each quotation as a mis-success. When you hear a new work for the first time, more energy is required than listening to a piece you already know. Very few composers quote from pieces that are unknown, and the function of quotation is therefore to make each listener feel as though they are in luck."

Kagel's most recent subversion of operatic space is *Entführung im Konzertsaal* (*Kidnapping in The Concert Hall*), which he completed around the turn of this century, some 30 years after *Staatsoper*. Before curtain up, the stage is set for a concert. However, when only half the orchestra turn up, Kagel creates the pretence that the rest are being held hostage at gunpoint backstage, while the kidnapper communicates with the conductor by phone. Expertly allying the genuineness of his score with theatrical illusion, Kagel leaves you convinced that there is indeed an assassination happening out of sight. Satisfying the audience's willingness to suspend disbelief even as the success of the work depends on it, Kagel reveals the absurdity of opera's unfounded performance rituals. And by seceding the audience's doubts about their own safety with his plausible hostage scenario, Kagel injects a sense of danger and



the dark unknown into a hideous tradition.

"I've become accustomed to the fact that when people go to the opera they look at the stage but hear the music less intensively," he reflects. "I, however, take the theatre seriously, which means I try to compose the theatrical events on the same level of density as the music. Theatre has been contaminated by its repertoire and by a curious misinterpretation of musical history. I made the decision to look critically at this contamination. Style doesn't really exist in opera, and the genre seems truer to me."

Since the Moscow theatre siege by Chechen freedom fighters last October, Einführung in Konrad's kidnapping scenario has acquired unexpected topicality. When it was performed in Birmingham at the end of 2000, the audience's belly laughs grew increasingly uncomfortable as the calamitous events unfolded. The drama ends in death, and Kagel himself is a little freaked that fiction and reality overlapped each other so quickly. "We're living in a world where catastrophes are already reality, and disasters are imminent. So what do we do? We do music!" he laughs sardonically. "If you are conscious of the way the world functions, then you must have real doubts and frustrations about being a musician or a composer. The death in this piece is backstage, but you know that a disaster has occurred, and that the musicians have been annihilated. When I heard about the siege in Moscow, the incredible thing was that the main tool of communication for the terrorists was the telephone. [And in my piece the plot is realised through a telephone conversation between the conductor and the kidnapper.]"

When he first arrived in Cologne, Kagel had intended to immerse himself inside the legendary electronic music studio at the WDR radio station. After all, this was the studio where Stockhausen had just composed his groundbreaking electronic transformation of the voice, *Gesang Der Jünglinge*. But Kagel quickly realised that electronic music had as many duplicitous taproots as opera. "I found concerts of electronic music to be rather curious and melancholic events," he muses. "The audience were looking at the speakers as though they were musicians, and were perhaps even waiting for musicians to emerge from the noise. I knew that this could not work, and it was better to hide this music away from the public." Kagel's diagnosis of the difficulty in presenting electronic music has surely been validated by history. His response to the problem came with *Transición II* (1958-59) and the vast hybrid electronic/acoustic soundscape *Acústica*, completed a decade later. *Transición II* contains in embryo Kagel's obsession with questioning the way musical notation operates in real time. Like Stockhausen's *Kontakte* (which appeared at exactly the same time as *Transición II*), Kagel juxtaposes the sound of piano and percussion with its electronically generated accompaniment. The pianist can choose whether to play the 35 triggers and pedals, or is also at liberty to select other elements to plug the gaps punctured in the fabric of the composition. The percussionist's role as a transitional figure between piano and electronics is made literal on stage, as he or she plays on the piano's wood and metal galls. A prerecorded electronic tape provides a fixed point of reference, while a sound engineer tapes moments of the performance in real time and immediately fires "samples" back at the musicians. Like the counterpoint between real and historical time in his *Sankt-Petersburg* (1965), the temporal disruptions of *Transición II* mess with the audience's perception of artificial "concert" time.

Despite its formal innovations, *Transición II* is not secure in the confidence of its own distinctive

harmonic or gestural language. However, by the time he created *Acústica* (1969-70), Kagel's compositional language had matured to reflect both his outsider status and sense of ironic distance from the "established" avant garde. Scored for "experimental sound producers and loudspeakers", the first sound to emerge in *Acústica* is the squeaking of a slowly deflating balloon. Kagel's self-assembled fagotars and plucked, beater percussion instruments forge an uncomfortable alliance with the electronic sounds, sometimes swamping them entirely. A warbling Italian operatic baritone voice occasionally rises to the surface, as Kagel draws a dynamic out of the cultural clash between conventional musical sounds and the emerging "brow new world" of electronics. In *Musik Für Renaissance-Instrumenten* (1965-66, in which Kagel writes contemporary music for instruments long regarded as obsolete) and *Exotica* (1970-71, where orchestra members must play "ethnic" and foreign instruments which they've never seen before), Kagel explored further this dialectical tug between progressive operations and regressive apparatus. This approach put Kagel at loggerheads with avant garde "establishment" figures like Stockhausen, who regarded his referential and ironic language to be riven with paradoxes and impurities. This was exactly the reaction Kagel had intended to provoke.

"In Argentina I was not interested in folklorism," he says, disavowing the early evolution of his musical language. "I did not want to write tangos or Aboriginal music with wrong chords. I wanted to investigate the possibilities of 'expressive' music. However I found that when I came to Europe the biggest problem with 12-tone music was in the harmony. It was no longer possible to build a piece from the attraction and repulsion of chords. As the aesthetic of music has changed over hundreds of years, composers have continually found new ways to exploit the tension and release of chords and keys. Harmony is like breathing and needs to renew its supply of oxygen. I became conscious very early on that 12-tone music eliminated this possibility."

While *Transición II* shadowed Stockhausen's *Kontakte*, Kagel's *Hétérophonie* (1959-61) experimented with form on a scale every bit as ambitious as the self-declared maestro's Gruppen for three orchestras. Premiered in Cologne in 1962, *Hétérophonie* presents a new alternative to much of the atonal music of the time. In classical music, "heterophony" is normally defined as the result of two or more musicians simultaneously performing different forms of the same melody. Kagel's piece expands this literal meaning into a heterophony made from collections of smaller micro-heterophonies. A group of 42 solo instruments (multiple soloists being a typical Kagel paradox) are assigned the instrumental colours of archetypes from the orchestral canon. Kagel links the process to an organist releasing his instrument's stops to produce a great sound. In *Hétérophonie*, the "micro-heterophony" stops, a "Schwund" stop and one metaphorically labelled (after Debussy) as "Prélude à l'après-midi d'une faune". Against these borrowed models, Kagel uses a sophisticated vocabulary of graphic symbols in the rest of the orchestra to ignite a looser and more random heterophony.

The message of *Hétérophonie* is that by overhauling a traditional notion of "orchestration" and devising methods that challenge the feudal system of control through which orchestras operate, the orchestra's birth as a creative force becomes a real possibility. Inevitably to say, the orchestra member who is perceived by Kagel as the most "autonomous" by placing even the limited creative responsibility of graphic notation on the musicians' shoulders, Kagel had tipped the power balance between composer and

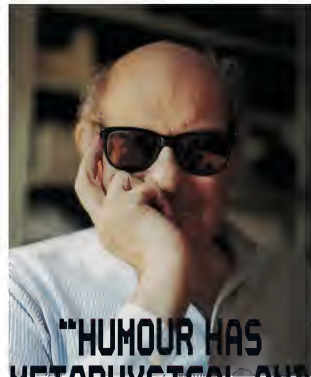
orchestra musician in favour of the players. Predictably enough, the first musicians to perform the piece apparently found such freedom intimidating and openly criticised the composer. Kagel got his own back when he dedicated the piece to "the Marquis de Sade and the West German Radio Symphony Orchestra".

"In my writing for this section of the orchestra, I purposefully made the direction and limits of what the players were to do unclear," clarifies Kagel. "That means that the musical notation and its realisation are suddenly in conflict. However, I never ask the players to improvise. I greatly admire the skill and inventiveness of jazz musicians like Theonious Monk, Charles Mingus and Ornette Coleman, but asking classically trained players of New Music to improvise is only relatively possible. The best you can hope for is that they will spontaneously reproduce a given language, and this is also the extent of what many jazz musicians and improvisers can achieve. For real improvisation you have to create a new language, and many improvisers are therefore not as free as they would like."

Kagel has written that *Hétérophonie* is so dry that "after a few minutes one either turns off or discovers countless delights". The work is partly a key comment on composers who are prepared to pull out all the stops, only to achieve an orchestration that sounds like Varèse or Debussy, completely unaware of their sonic forgery. But this humorous aside is buried within the concept of the piece, and it's not the punchline. Typically, the irony in Kagel's concert music from the 1960s is more often understated than overtly spelt out. From the 1970s onwards, however, his pieces become infused with a more explicit repertoire of droll portraiture, satirical jokes and out-and-out slapstick. But he is far from mellowing. His new works are ever more pointed and penetrating in their investigation of the role of art in society.

As early as 1960, with his *Sun Solène (On Stage)*, Kagel had satirised the New Music scene by devising a convoluted and near-meaningless text that parodied the kind of heated political discussions about New Music heard at festivals and conferences. Instrumentalists shadow the direction of the speech with gestures that are sometimes expressive, but are more often as pompous and vacuous as the text. By 1978, Kagel had extended this concept to the radio piece *Der Trüben* (1978-79), in which he himself took the role of a pompous, self-important, and somewhat speech against a background of trumpalst brass band music. But the words are gobbledygook, arbitrarily cobbled together from soundbites and slogans that he had invented in the style of newspaper headlines and political interviews. If *Sun Solène* parodies the self-important regard with which the New Music scene views itself, *Der Trüben* satirises similar faultlines in the Western political culture of style over substance.

Radio and film have allowed Kagel to act on his critiques of the concert hall and opera, and also to engage with the world of the media. In 1970, he dedicated the bicentenary of Beethoven's birth in 1970, *Ludwig Van* exists both as a film and in a version for chamber ensemble. In the film, a camera slowly pans around an imaginary "Beethoven house", where fragments of Beethoven's music have been pasted onto the walls (one of the set designers was the artist Joseph Beuys). Meanwhile, the players read the music from photographs of these haphazardly arranged scores. Because they have been arranged for the eye and not the ear, the grammar of musical notation – clefs, key signatures, time signatures and the complex ordering of bars – has been obliterated. Instead, the listener hears Beethoven's music through a smudged and



"HUMOUR HAS METAPHYSICAL AND PHILOSOPHICAL DIMENSIONS THAT TOUCH ME ON A DEEP LEVEL"

distorted looking glass. Though it's subtitled *Homage À Beethoven*, the piece questions the classical music heritage industry's obsession with anniversaries. Kagel's satires have led some to view him as the joker in the 1950s avant-garde pack. But enjoying Kagel's jokes without appreciating the darker undertones of his satire is to underestimate the subversive nature of his ideas. Kagel himself is in no doubt that humour is a grave business.

"Yes, I have a sense of humour," he admits, "and already as a child I was very suspicious of people who were terribly serious. You know, to say 'I am serious' is a quite ridiculous statement, and if someone is ideologically serious it is often a mask. Humour has metaphysical and philosophical dimensions that touch me on a deep level, and I can only take people seriously if they have a sense of humour. In our profession there are many people who use seriousness only to stress how important they are as a composer or a conductor. However, with humour it becomes possible to express a wide spectrum of ideas."

Kagel has recently found a natural home on the decidedly postmodernist and often whimsical Winter & Winter label, founded by Stefan Winter. Among WW's first Kagel releases was the extraordinary radio piece *Playback Play*, which was inspired by a visit to a music sales fair. Poking fun at the inflated sales pitch of a music industry sector more concerned with ringing cash tills than art, Kagel works into its textures the simultaneous looping of canned music and live performance deployed, he dryly notes, by the organisers without much discernment.

In contrast, the newly issued CD of Kagel's *First Piano Trio* from 1985 (coupled with *Black Madrigal*, and played by The Schoenberg Ensemble) grew from the blissful experience Kagel had when he was preparing his theatrical epic on the Devil, *Der Mündliche Verrat* (The Oral Treason, 1982-83). "The trio is an instrumentation of the theatrical work that explores the characters in a new way," he comments. "Before *Der Mündliche Verat* went into production, I'd written my music as a piano score. I like the idea of trying to work in the exact opposite way to how I normally approach a piece, and when I was preparing for the theatre piece, I wrote the music first and then looked for texts. I therefore wrote sections of very different character, and this is why I say the *Piano Trio* is built from character pieces."

The premiere of his *Doppelkonzert* reprises Kagel's relationship with The Schoenberg Ensemble, who assemble the qualities the composer expects from musicians engaging with his scores. "Difficulty is not really the issue," he contends. "But the musician must have the impression that if he works on the part, he will do it better. The way a composer communicates to musicians and then to listeners is through notation, and this code has to be decipherable or else it is not a proper code. One of the major problems with interpretation is how to avoid merely reproducing a particular idea of a piece. A performer has to become the composer as they play the piece."

"The French," Kagel concludes, "have a marvellous word: *décligner*, which means 'to read' the code, rather than 'to copy'. This is what I am asking my performers to do." □ Kagel's *Piano Trio* is on Winter & Winter. *Hétérophone* and *Der Tribut* are on Wergo, and *Mode* has scheduled new versions of *Transición II* and *Phonophone* for the autumn. *Auride/Neve* have a seven-volume Kagel edition (including *St-Bach-Passion*), and Deutsche Grammophon have just reissued 1998 and *Music For Renaissance Instruments*. A new performance of Ludwig Van and other works is available on Aeon. Kagel is the featured composer at this month's Aldeburgh Festival – details from www.aldeburgh.co.uk. Thanks to Ian Pace



THE PRIMER:

SOFT

MACHINE

A bi-monthly guide to the core recordings of a particular artist or genre. This month: John Cratchley and Samantha Brown trace Soft Machine's passage from London's psychedelic underground to their later jazz rock peaks, while picking up the trails of founding members Kevin Ayers, David Allen and Robert Wyatt, and touching base with their fellow pioneers Keith Tippett and Nucleus.

Illustration: Savage Pencil



The conventionalism of jazz-rock argues that it pursued the worst excesses of each genre, and caused irrevocable damage to both. Peter Schulze, who produced many jazz-rock concerts for Radio Bremen in the 1970s, recalls that during this time many jazz groups incorporated rock sensibilities, but far fewer rockers repaid the compliment. The outstanding exception was Soft Machine. At the height of their powers, this polymorphous British outfit achieved a complete synthesis of rock and jazz by drawing not on the excesses, but the strengths of both: raw energy, high volume, intricate time signatures, exemplary musicianship, expressive improvisation, gravitas and whimsy. To arrive at such a successful amalgam required a rare mix of alchemy and serendipity.

The journey starts in the early 1960s, in Canterbury, Kent, where grammar school friends Robert Wyatt, Hugh Hopper and Mike Ratledge bonded over a shared passion for the pop and free jazz of Charles Mingus, Thelonious Monk and Ornette Coleman. In early 1962 Wyatt befriended David Allen, an itinerant Australian guitarist and Beat poetry aficionado. Allen became a mentor to the three friends, inviting them to join him in London for an event at the ICA performing free jazz and poetry in the company of Brian Gysin and William S Burroughs. Soon after, Allen moved to Paris to conduct tape experiments with Burroughs and the then relatively unknown Terry Riley, among others. Back in Canterbury, meanwhile, Ratledge left for Oxford to study philosophy, and Wyatt and Hopper formed The Wilde Flowers with Hopper's brother Brian, Wyatt's brother Robert, and friends Peter Sinfield, Richard Coughlan and Kevin Ayers. A few Vintecomp compilations documenting the so-called Canterbury scene quickly scotch the legend about it being The UK's Haight-Ashbury, but they usefully reveal the Wilde Flowers as a not untypical local group – bar the odd job of free jazz – playing R&B and soul covers and originals. Allen eventually returned to Canterbury with unusual American guitarist Larry Norio to rehearse with Wyatt and the Wilde Flowers, but he left for Oxford, and Wyatt took on their place as the rest of The Wilde Flowers to form Canterbury's other great musicians, Canada.

When Nolan left as quickly as he came, they went out as the quartet with Allen taking over on guitar, Wyatt on drums and vocals, Rattledge on organ, and Ayres on bass and vocals. After a mercurially brief spell playing out as Mr Head, in late 1966 they returned to the States as The Soft Machine, after a thorough novel, with author's blessing. Although in the beginning Soft Machine worked from a song book, it was fed by two highly idiosyncratic writers in Ayers and Wyatt, while their penchant for improvisation meant they were soon taking their songs beyond the standard three minute pop barner. About the only place the group felt any sense of belonging was in London's burgeoning psychedeloid underground, which was not in the least a place where those amalgam of heads went to all shores of weirdness.

Residencies at the UFO and Zebra clubs and extensive touring in the UK followed until July 1966. Outside London's head set, however, the group quickly ran into hostile, uncomprehending audiences with little sympathy for the Soft Machine brand of psychedelia: revolution, which was founded on porous medleys of songs and jams at excessive volume. In the summer of 1967, they temporarily quit the UK for dates in France, only to lose guitarist Alien on their way back, when he was refused UK entry as an undesirable alien.

For the remainder of 1967, Soft Machine carried on as a trio. In January 1968, they departed for San Francisco to join Jimi Hendrix's US tour as support group. Before returning home, Soft Machine recorded their first album at the Record Plant Studios, New

York. It was eventually released the following year, but only in the USA. Before it came out, Soft Machine had rejoined Hendrix for the winter leg of his US tour. The punishing schedule left the group exhausted, causing them to split up as soon as it was over. But with a two-EP contract to honour, Wyatt and Ratledge were persuaded to reform, recruiting Hugh Hopper on bass in place of Ayers, who had disappeared somewhere in Spain. In 1969, they fulfilled their contractual requirements by recording *Soft Machine Volume 2*.

The chemistry of this Soft Machine trio, experimenting with song segues and ever extending instrumental bridges at deafening volume, triggered the chain reaction that caused the tectonic plates of rock and jazz to shift, grate and collide. In an incredibly fertile three year span between 1969-71, Soft Machine concertin'd between three and seven members, as the core trio experimented with a horn section involving trumpeter Marm Churg, Elton Dean on alto sax and saxello, Tim Dobsen on soprano and tenor and Nick Evans on trombone. The horn section, minus Dobsen, had been lifted from the album *Three* (see jazz-rock outfit: Keith Tippett's Sextet). Tippett was a jazz pianist who was already integrating rock sensibilities seamlessly into his music. His sextet had a fixed horn section, but employed the rhythm players best suited to his music's fast-changing demands. Tippett's base pool included Jeff Clyne, Roy Babbington and Harry Miller, and the drum seat was filled by Phil Howard, John Marshall, Bryen Spring or Alan Jackson. Both Howard and Marshall were destined to replace Wyatt in Soft Machine, when the drumming vocalist was finally squeezed out of the group he founded by an instrumental faction which thought they were above or beyond mere songwriting. Babbington also collaborated with The Softs, eventually replacing Hopper. In the meantime, the impact of Miles Davis's *Bitches Brew* spread on the rock world was sending ripples to British shores, and was heard clearly in the electric music of Ian Carr's Nucleus, the third indispensable group of UK's great jazz-rock experiment, featuring rhythm section of Jeff Clyne and John Marshall.

The music exploding out of this Soft Machine/Keith Tippett/Nucleus triangle was a powerful, often astonishing rock-driven fusion fired up on free impulses as it enthusiastically negotiated jazz's trickier time signatures. Between them, they opened up a space where the likes of Henry Cow cross-fertilised with their oppositional rock improv, where Soft Machine founder David Allen located an audience for Gong's loopy synths, busking sixes and spore rock silliness; where The Softs' Canterbury colleagues Caravan timidly raised the hemline of their post-psychedic prog whimsy, if only for a tantalising moment; where Hatfield And The North forged a thrilling, if short-lived, fusion-tempered rock just before the deluge of thrill-seeking second-string jazzers washed the excrement out of the jazz-rock adventure. But these are bit players of varying importance in this particular story. Besides, most of its principal players managed to engineer their own downfalls without any outside help. After six albums, Soft Machine had shaken out the last of its experimental elements with the loss of bassist Keith Tippett and keyboard Elton Dean, whose playing kept the band's fluid intensity afloat. Then, in 1973, *Fourth* and fifth releases, *Rattledjinn* and *Meanwhile*, sullied his way through Seven and Bundles (1978), Soft Machine's first record for their new label Harvest, and then cut the spotlight for a career in library music, apparently. By the time Karl Jenkins took the helm, Soft Machine had completely frittered away their earlier phenomenal ability to orchestrate monumental blocks of fuzz bass, organ and brass noise with wit and grace.

With Jenkins doggedly running the franchise until 1981, Soft Machine accelerated the erosion of the group's reputation that had set in for real when Hopper left after Six. But in truth, the damage had begun earlier. Indeed, some argue it was seeded in the same impulses that drove them to become one of the loudest, most powerful and at times pitiless innovative forces in any field at the dawn of the 70s. These peaks were attained at the great cost of Robert Wyatt's vocals and humane lyrics, not to mention his inspired drumming. Fortunately, labels like Gunefono, Voxacoust and, lately, Hux have unearthed a new vein of archive releases that attest to the group's astonishing power and capacity for change between 1967/78.

It is no coincidence that all Soft Machine's early abecedarians – David Allen, Hugh Hopper, Elton Dean and Wyatt, both with Matching Mole and solo – went on creating absorbing music, while Jenkins made his mark on the charts in the 1990s with the execrable chill-out/Gregorian chant project Adiemus (which, incidentally, credited Rattled).

THE SOFT MACHINE

JET PROPELLED PHOTOGRAPHS

CHARLT SNAP133 CD 1983/1000

SOFT MACHINE TURNS ON VOL 1

VOCEPRINT VP231 CD 19572001

SOFT MACHINE TURNS ON VOL 2

VOICPRINT VP234 CD 19402991

In April 1967, *Soft Machine* – here, David Allen on guitar, Kevin Ayers on bass and vocals, Mike Rutledge on keyboards, and Robert Wyatt on drums and vocals – spent three days in De Lane Lea Studios recording with producer, impresario and entrepreneur Giorgio Gomelsky. Rumour has it the group thought they were making music publishers' demos, but Gomelsky insists they were there to record an album and took the tapes away with him. Years after the fact, these have disseminated under various different titles and compilations, and here as *Air Propelled Photographs*. Its raw playing and sound quality argue that these were indeed intended as demos, but there's no mistaking the potential talent in the material, a good sign for writers who were then on the verge of leaving the Wilde Flowers. Whatever the group's unique approach to song, its itself in early versions of Ayers' 'Shooting At The Moon' and Hugh Hopper's 'Memories' (later covered by Allen on 1971's *Banana Moon* and Wyatt on the B side of his surprise 1974 hit 'I'm A Believer'). Though he's basically comping keyboard accompaniment, Rutledge's ear is finely tuned to the nuances of Wyatt's falsetto, tracking mood shifts as the vocal others between melancholy, heartbreak and slapstick punning. But Allen's playing ranges from rudimentary to just about competent. He has not yet evolved the shimmering glissando – an echoing, spacey bottleneck technique he devised after watching Syd Barrett – that distinguishes early Gong. Complementing his own then, nascent vocals, Wyatt's soaring, soaring guitar riffs addides early *Soft Machine's* soaring and soaring audio.

The bootleg quality live recordings and studio demos constituting the two volumes of *Turns On* confirm the early potential of early Softs with and without Allen, but you have to listen hard to hear it. You have to weigh the significance of their handful of recordings from the Middle Earth club and elsewhere, documenting the group's participation in London's psychedelic underground, against the crudely sound that renders it nigh impossible to

Top to bottom: Gong, pictured in 1971 in Hirérouville, France, with Kevin Ayers (2nd left) and David Allan (centre); pre-Soft Machine incarnation The Wilde Flowers on stage in Canterbury, 1968; Soft Machine touch down at the UFO Club, London, 1967



divine the ways they were expanding the psychedelic bubble. Sadly, none of these sets include Soft Machine's only single, "Love Makes Sweet Music" (by Kevin Ayers), backed with "Reelin', Scavellin', Dealin'" and released on Polydor in 1967.

THE SOFT MACHINE THE SOFT MACHINE

DWE WAY RECORDS MCAG0064 CD 1989

VOLUME 2

PROBE SP0102 CD 1986

To all intents and purposes, Soft Machine's debut album was recorded live in the studio, with "non-interfering" producers Chris Chandler and Tom Wilson. But they weren't being jazzpurist about it, and when they did indulge the odd studio intervention, such as a "phased" drum solo zapping between speakers like a stereo demonstration record, they did so to glorious effect. Though they're still song-oriented here, their tunes are as much vehicles for the trio's dazzling instrumental interplay as vessels for the lyrics.

Ratledge's organ is bursting with ebullient energy, while Ayers has developed a keener balance of rebounding rhythm and bass-led melodies in the absence of a guitarist. Wyatt, meanwhile, is already incorporating "found" lyrics and everyday speech patterns in songs like "Why Am I So Short?". But the highlights are "We Did It Again", an awesome exercise in numbskull minimalism hobbled to a riff every bit as compelling as The Kinks' "You Really Got Me" and Velvet Underground's "What Goes On"; and Ayers's mental wake-up call, "Why Are We Sleeping?"

With Ayers retired hurt after their two 1968 American tours, Wyatt and Ratledge recruited bass-playing roadie Hugh Hopper to make Volume 2. Now their sole vocalist, Wyatt is in fine form throughout, scuttling through "A Concise British Alphabet" and his more complex wordgames. Ironically plummy cleverness claims, "in general everybody's heads are more together" and that the music "may impose cerebral responsibilities on the listener". Too true.

The early Soft Machine sound is a minefield of contradictory elements. Wyatt's drumming is magnificent from the outset: confident, strident, polyrhythmically complex and refreshingly unpredictable. And he's already a wonderfully enigmatic singer, his expressive falsetto negotiating lyrical passages of intellectual realism, elegant frailty and absurdist improvisation. At this stage, Ratledge is the most technically advanced player and his organ work is as concise as it is magisterial. The departure of both Allen and Ayers had precipitated the group's move into extended improvisation. Upon Hopper's arrival this direction was sealed. With additional saxophone input of Brian Hopper, Soft Machine were steadily moving away from song qua song.

SOFT MACHINE SPACED

CUNE FORM RECORDS CD 1989/1996

A fascinating digression more than their next move, Spaced occupies a unique position within The Softs' output. Resulting from an invitation to produce music for artist Peter Dinkley's "living art installation" at London's Roundhouse in early 1969, the group declined to perform live (although they had famously accompanied a Picasso play in the south of France a year or so earlier). Instead they duly set about amassing prerecorded material to cover for their non-happening at the happening, so to speak. Brian Hopper was again drafted in to add a horn voice.

Released and recorded in an East London warehouse, the finished soundtrack was constructed around loops and effects, and put together with engineer Bob Woodford using distinctly Heath Robinson methods like looping tapes around milk bottles. The ad hoc methodology produces a distinctive musique



concrete feel, with the resulting tonescape anticipating the textures of Ambient.

SOFT MACHINE BBC RADIO 1967-1971 HUX H10907 28CD 1989

BACKWARDS

CUNEIFORM RUNE119 CD 1988/2002

Both these live compilations illuminate how Soft Machine were far better live than in the recording studio, even if the only audience actually present was a radio engineer. Covering the eight sessions the group recorded for John Peel's BBC Top Gear show, the Hux set spans every significant incarnation of the group after David Allen's departure, including their septet experiments with an expanded brass frontline borrowed from Keith Tippett, On Hux's evidence, Peel and his producers had a knack for catching the group on the cusp of change, and happily gave The Softs free rein. Even though Wyatt ironically comments on the necessity of shortening tracks to standard pop length in his amazing stream of consciousness rendition of "Moon In June", the song medleys mostly break the ten minute mark. Even so, the group exercise remarkable economy in their Peel contributions, making the Hux set a wonderful summary of Soft Machine's growth from their 1967 summer of love to the colder museum monumentalism that prefigured Wyatt's departure in 1971. Wyatt has commented how he got interested in the idea of writing songs where the melody line followed the pattern of everyday speech. Thus, in this legendary version of "Moon In June, 'I can still remember/The last time we played on Top Gear/And though each little song/Was less than three minutes long/Mike squeezed a solo in somehow/And although we like our longer tunes/It seems polite to cut them down/To little bits/They might be hits/Who plans it... either us'".

Backwards collects live material from various UK and European dates, including some septet recordings from Paris in November 1968, and a demo recording of "Moon In June" by Wyatt solo. Its solitary nature evidences Wyatt's increasing sense of alienation, as The Softs' power base shifted.

THE KEITH TIPPETT GROUP YOU ARE HERE... I AM THERE NINETEEN SIXTY-ONE TO 1975 DEDICATED TO YOU, BUT YOU WEREN'T LISTENING

KARMA KATZ CD 1991

Pianist Keith Tippett's first album undoubtedly laid the ground rules for his particular jazz-rock agenda. With all the material written by him, the album has a satisfying continuity. More importantly, this is composition of the highest order: measured and balanced in his positioning of instruments to give maximum dynamic effect. The pieces unravel slowly, with Tippett gradually introducing rock-flavoured influences, while the playing throughout is forthright and sometimes openly aggressive. Even at this early stage, Tippett's development, the rigour of his thought process makes any reference to specific forms superfluous, be they jazz or rock. The second track "I Wish There Was A Nowhere" introduces a repeated vamp over which Elton Dean weaves an accomplished alto solo, while trumpeter Chang and trombonist Evans supply swelling chordal overlays. Bassist Cyne and drummer Jackson build a mesmerising pulse over the 14 minute duration of the composition.

If Tippett's debut album is inexpressive, ranging from fractured avant-garde to pulsating repetition. Dedicated to You is, quite simply, indispensable. The compositional credits are more evenly dispersed here, with Evans, Dean, Hopper and Chang all contributing. From the outset the album is a rhythmic masterpiece, utilising drummers Wyatt, Phil Howard and Bryan

Spring as well as conga player Tony Use. Spontaneous joy is the result, with Chang and Evans in particularly raucous mood, melding free jazz and rock sensibilities even as they boil to the surface in a fierce bid for independence from each other. Tippett's winning is so integrated, however, that these competing elements are never allowed to nip the peace apart. Instead, they generate a terrific and continuous tension. "Thoughts To Geoff" illustrates this perfectly, with Evans contributing explosive trombone, while Dean's saxello solo on "Green And Orange Night Park" is worthy of Roland Kirk. Tippett, meanwhile, ranges all over acoustic and electric pianos to great effect.

SOFT MACHINE THIRD

COLUMBIA 4434972 CD 1970

The third studio album is The Softs' most complete statement of intent. It was originally released in 1970 as a double LP, with a side each given over to Hopper's "Facelit", Rutledge's "Slightly All The Time", Wyatt's "Moon In June" and Rutledge's "Out-Bloody-Rageous". "Moon In June" is pretty much a solo Wyatt recording, except for Rutledge's fuzzily scrawled organ signature towards the end. Wonderful as it is, it suffers in comparison with the full group's inspired response to the same piece on the Hux BBC Radio set. On Third, the absurdist element that once defined Soft Machine's group character has been all but ousted by the Rutledge-Hopper axis's heavily pedalled emphasis on fuzzed-up jazz-rock on horn charts, with new recruit Elton Dean's alto and saxello mostly displacing Wyatt's vocalising. The sacrifice of his voice does not preclude Wyatt bringing the relentless swinging energy and invention of his drumming to Rutledge's and Hopper's splendid side-long compositions. Recorded live at Birmingham's sequestered Mothers club and Croydon's Fairfield Hall, Hopper's "Facelit" ruses out of a scorching electric piano, until it's abruptly halted by Rutledge's heavily fuzzed organ squalls. Gradually Dean works up the courage to begin a conversation for the whole quartet. The core of Rutledge's loveliest composition, "Slightly All The Time", is Hopper's fabulous walking bass part. The organist's other track, "Out-Bloody-Rageous", bursts into being out of endlessly circling keyboards and swooping sax squalls, with an augmented brass section pitching precarious choruses between Dean's and Rutledge's grandstanding.

ROBERT WYATT THE END OF AN EAR

COLUMBIA 4434942 CD 1970

Describing himself on the sleeve as an "out of work pop singer", Wyatt was still Soft Machine's drummer when he recorded this first solo statement in 1970. Though it's a predominantly vocal album, with Wyatt playing "drums, mouth, piano, organ", he's got anything but pop on his mind. The album's two takes of Gil Evans's "Las Vegas Tango Part One" are the closest he gets to actual song. Otherwise the music centres on Wyatt's adroitly shifting morphologies of his multitracked vocal scuttling. Mark Chang and Elton Dean provide multitracked horn and sax treatments, Mark Elridge and Caravan's David Sinclair contribute piano and organ, but the fascination here is the way Wyatt overdubs his many discrete parts into an uneasy and frequently heartbreaking Interrogation of his role as a singer in a group that claims to have outgrown the song.

SOFT MACHINE NOISEITE

CUNEIFORM RUNE1130 CD 1993/2000

FACELIT

VORDEFPRINT 39034 19CD 1990/1994

Noisette is sourced from the same recording of The Softs' January 1970 concert at Croydon Fairfield Hall

from which "Facelit" was partially lifted for Third. Here they went out as a quartet, featuring Lyn Dobson's soprano, flute and vocals. At this stage, The Softs were restlessly seeking new elements to keep themselves fresh, and here the trio responded well to the evident emptiness already existing between Dobson and Dean.

When they returned to Croydon just three months later on the Facelit double, they had already reverted to their standard 1970 quartet. Captured on an audience recording made by Hugh's brother Brian on a falling portable cassette player, Facelit nevertheless offers today's listeners an accurate impression of how the group must have sounded from "out front". The music is so memorably good, it's almost terrifying. The quartet throw up shock repertoire pieces, only with all the supports removed. The way they roared around shoring up these towering and teetering compositional blocks with improvised bridges is astonishing. Soft Machine's rehabilitated reputation is largely founded on this pair of releases.

KEVIN AYERS JOY OF A TOY

THE SEVEN SEAS

DAEVID ALLEN BANANA MOON

CANJUNE C11912 CD 1991

These early solo albums by two founding members underline how a long and happy life in Soft Machine wasn't really on the cards for either of them. On Ayers's impenetrable debut *Joy Of A Toy*, the first of a great trilogy that included *Shooting At The Moon* and *Watershedshewingswing*, Wyatt drums on most tracks and both Hugh Hopper and Mike Rutledge contribute; but it is in no way a cloned Soft Machine album. Ayers's songs are beautifully arranged throughout by pianist/composer David Bedford, with Paul Buckmaster on cello, Paul Harris on oboe and Jeff Cyne on double bass. The album's hazily surreal pastoralism veils Ayers's deeper interest in articulating his Gurdjieff-inspired attempts to awaken humankind from its slumber. Well, this was 1970 and Ayers wasn't the type to take umbrage if everyone snoozed through the message. For *Shooting At The Moon*, Ayers put together a ramshackle improvising group to rattle the symmetry of the earlier album's arrangements: His group The Whole World turned around Bedford, Led Coshin on saxes and "zobophones", Mike Githeld on bass and guitar and Mick Fincher on drums. His earlier jazz influence rears up in a crudely effective see-sawing rock improvisations to terrorise fans of his sweeter songs, like the charming opener, "May I?".

David Allen's solo debut *Banana Moon* is simpler but no less insistent. Wyatt is again present on drums, and by now Allen's lead guitar is a little more accomplished. You can tell how far he's come by contrasting this album's version of Hugh Hopper's "Memories", also featuring a poignant Wyatt vocal, with the same song on Jet Propelled Photographs. Now taking it at a slower pace, Allen brings out an essential quality beyond the young, staid Soft Machine's reach. All the other songs are Allen's own.

SOFT MACHINE FOURTH/FIFTH

COLUMBIA 4434941 CD 1971 & 1972

VIRTUALLY

CUNEIFORM RUNE1100 CD 1991/1997

Fourth is Wyatt's last outing with the group he founded and squired through their difficult years. It's no coincidence that it is The Softs' most overtly jazz album. You can put this down to Elton Dean's growing influence, but it's more important that it largely determines the character of the album, even though he, like Rutledge, only contributes one composition, compared with Hopper's pair: the side-long "Virtually"



Clockwise from top: Soft Machine (Kevin Ayers, Robert Wyatt, Mike Ratledge and David Albert) in Dulwich Park; Wyatt and Ratledge joined by Hugh Hopper, 1971, at St Katharine's Dock; two shots of recording at Olympic Studios, February 1967



Matching Mole (top and centre), with Bill McConeck on bass; Nucleus with (left) Ian Carr. Opposite page: Ritchie Blackmore with Ratledge and Agnew at the South London house where Soft Machine resided in early 1967

suits and "Kings And Queens". Again, Charing, Evans and Hastings fill in brass ensemble interjections, and this time they're joined by the tenor sax of Alan Skidmore. If *Fourth's* overall balance represents a step forward from *Third*, with Ratledge's electric piano much in evidence, it's not immediately clear exactly what they gained with that advance. For all the brass frontline's free bluster, it's Hopper's compositional lyricism that shines through this album. Wyatt might have been muted, but his drumming is simply sublime throughout. Even so, the album's momentum is all but severed from the group's psychedelic rock roots. For the first time, The Softs sound less themselves and more like Kerh Tippett's group. Jazz now prevails.

Fifth is hinged around the two drummers who were auditioned for Wyatt's vacant chair. Phil Howard and John Marshall got a side each on the original vinyl LP, and the music correspondingly vacillates between their opposing styles. Roy Babbington is once again in evidence on double bass. Howard is an incredibly exciting drummer with free music propensities, who promised much in his shortlived tenure. Sadly, he wastes his energies driving the group into a free improv corner that no one else particularly wishes to inhabit. John Marshall, on the other hand, is a more precise timekeeper. His side of *Fifth* is altogether more disciplined and less spirited.

Virtually is a pristine recording from the vaults of Radio Bremen that captures the classic Wyatt-Ratledge-Hopper-Dean quartet in its final stages. It offers live renditions of "Tooth", "Kings And Queens" and a truncated "Virtually". More intriguing are the early versions of "All White" and "Pigling Bland" (from *Fifth*), which suggest how that album might have turned out had Wyatt stayed on. But by this point the group's internal power struggles have resolved themselves in Ratledge's favour, and though Wyatt sings, the set is curiously introverted, as if the group are playing it as a private rite of passage sounding an elegy for their own doomed youth. Under the shadow of such compositional sobriety, Dean's freeblowing tendency has also been brought in for questioning.

ELTON DEAN JUST US

CUNEIFORM BUNE103 CD 1971

He was ousted soon enough. Dean's recently reissued solo debut provides clear evidence of his indomitable free spirit. Here, the emphasis is on fiery improvisation over Phil Howard's flailing polyrhythms of a kind that no longer fitted Soft Machine's masterpiece. Dean augments his core trio of trumpeter Charing, bassist Neville Whitehead and Howard with contributions from Mike Ratledge and future Softs bassist Roy Babbington on two tracks. Further, *Just Us* reprises Soft Machine's "Neo-Caribbean Grades" in a set otherwise spontaneously "composed" in the studio. Refreshing such spontaneity, his playing throughout is exemplary.

NUCLEUS ELASTIC ROCK/ WE'LL TALK ABOUT IT LATER

BGO BGCCD47 CD 1970

THE PRETTY REDHEAD BBC SESSIONS

HUX HJ0009 CD 1971 09/2003

LIVE IN BREMEN

CUNEIFORM BUNE133/134 CD 1971/2003

Trumpeter and Miles Davis biographer Ian Carr formed Nucleus with the intention of electrifying jazz-rock, and *Elastic Rock* more than fulfils his sonic vision. Carr's cool, muted trumpet and mellow flugelhorn combine with the meandering soprano of Ken Jenkins, who also plays electric piano to great effect, and Brian Smith's tenor. Their unison playing is dramatically offset by the tension created by guitarist Chris Spedding. Driven by



the outstanding rhythm section of Marshall and Cygne, their impact is as immediate as rock.

Spidding's "black" style of elongating chords and phrases made him a much sought-after session player, but he still constituted part of the stable line-up that recorded its successor the following year, *We'll Talk About It Later* consolidates the group's pole position in jazz-rock. Nucleus's approach to fusion is cooler than Soft Machine's, and their more sophisticated arrangements are directed towards ensemble unity. At this stage, that ambition doesn't inhibit their ability to rock, however, and Spidding even adds a certain funkiness, but it's Carr's clarion blast that directs Nucleus's forward momentum, leaving Jenkins and Spidding to alternate spicy interjections of guitar and electric piano behind his and Smith's precision soloing.

Recorded in 1971 for BBC's *Jazz London*, Hux's radio set reveals Nucleus weren't the kind of guys to let it all hang out live. On the double *Live In Bremen*, Spidding is replaced by guitarist Ray Russell for a set drawn from their first three albums.



MATCHING MOLE

MATCHING MOLE

COLUMBIA 6654792 CD 1979

MATCHING MOLE'S LITTLE RED RECORD

COLUMBIA COLMML344802 CD 1982

SMOKE SIGNALS

CUNEFORM BUNE160 CD 2001

MARCH

CUNEFORM BUNE172 CD 1979/2001

Matching Mole was a Robert Wyatt solo project until CBS pressured him to form a group to promote it. Named by distorting the French for "Soft Machine" ("Machine Mole"), and made up of old Canterbury mates David Sinclair (keyboards) and Phil Miller (guitar), plus Bill MacCormick (bass), Matching Mole weren't about to interfere with Wyatt's original intention to record "an album of love songs". Much of it largely features his melancholy musings at the mellotron he found in the studio. He stretches that instrument's lumbering tonalities over skeletal piano to utterly disarming effect on the poignant "O Caroline", where he steps out of the frame to describe his new group in the act of recording the broken love song he's now singing. Hemmed in with his multitracked harmonies, the piano song "Signed Curtain" finds him intoning "This is the first verse", etc., as he slowly works his way through the template of a pop song to the devastating last line, when he admits to the futility of attempting to communicate his feelings in words. Thereafter, Matching Mole quickly developed into an ersatzly effective Improvising group headed by guitarist Phil Miller's relatively mood-sensitive "Part Of The Dance".

Unhappy with Mole's change of direction, Sinclair jumped ship, and was replaced by former Nucleus electric pianist Dave MacRae on their second album, *Little Red Record*. With its daft skits and gooning satire framing tracks as great as "God Song", etc., as he slowly works his way through the template of a pop song to the devastating last line, when he admits to the futility of attempting to communicate his feelings in words. Thereafter, Matching Mole quickly developed into an ersatzly effective Improvising group headed by guitarist Phil Miller's relatively mood-sensitive "Part Of The Dance". Unhappy with Mole's change of direction, Sinclair jumped ship, and was replaced by former Nucleus electric pianist Dave MacRae on their second album, *Little Red Record*. With its daft skits and gooning satire framing tracks as great as "God Song", etc., as he slowly works his way through the template of a pop song to the devastating last line, when he admits to the futility of attempting to communicate his feelings in words. Thereafter, Matching Mole quickly developed into an ersatzly effective Improvising group headed by guitarist Phil Miller's relatively mood-sensitive "Part Of The Dance".



PHOTOS: REFLECTIONS PHOTO LAB, MARK FILLER, SPYDER INC

wheelchair. The accident prompted Wyatt to embark on his ongoing quest to construct one of contemporary music's most affecting and idiosyncratic songbooks, on a string of releases which has continued up to 1997's *Shleep*.

SOFT MACHINE

SIX

COLUMBIA 4649812 CD 1973

In keeping with their by now established ratio of a major line-up change per album, on *Six* Elton Dean has been replaced by Nucleus's Karl Jenkins. Originally a double LP, *Six* has some very fine moments, but it's a long way from the original group's sensibilities. A virtuosic oboe player, Jenkins also plays baritone and soprano saxos and electric piano. The first half of the album was recorded live in Brighton and Guildford, with Ratledge and Jenkins sharing composing honours with John Marshall's "B From 13 (For Phil Seaman With Love & Thanks)".

Unsurprisingly, given the presence of Jenkins and Marshall, some tracks bear Nucleus's hallmark accentuated rock riffing. On its original release, *Six* drew criticism that the group were now prone to rambling, and that they had lost their essential spark. Such remarks evidence a partial deafness to the careful pattern building of the Marshall/Hopper rhythm section. They consolidate these new compositions' reliance on overlapping structures, which recall the systems musics of Philip Glass and Steve Reich. Yet this quartet haven't entirely lost their urge to improvise. They may no longer appeal to the rock-based contingent of Soft Machine's fanbase, but its jazz aficionados go home satisfied. By this time, the numbers were running out for Ratledge, The *Six*'s last surviving original member. He shuffled and sukked through the desultory *Seven* and *Bundles* and then quit.

KEITH TIPPETT'S CENTIPEDE

SEPTEMBER ENERGY

DISCONFORME DISC1666 CD 1971

The inspired insanity of Tippett's *September Energy* is arguably the peak of the jazz-rock collusions Soft Machine set in motion back in the mid-60s. To realise the work, Tippett created the 50 piece organism Centipede, whose sections move independently yet attain unstoppable momentum and keen direction. Lord knows what possessed him to assemble such a beast. It took a musician/producer with the taste for marshalling skills of Robert Fripp to help him tame it on record. "When I formed Centipede," wrote Tippett, "I wanted to enfold all the friends that I knew as much as possible, from the classical world, to the jazz world, the jazz-rock world, and the rock-rock world." Naturally, it embraces all and none of these genres simultaneously.

HUGH HOPPER

1984

CUNEFORM BUNE104 CD 1979

Hopper's first solo album is a musical realisation of the visionary George Orwell novel from which it takes its name. Partly responding to "The Softs becoming "a rather ordinary British jazz-rock outfit", Hopper revisited his early 1960s tape-loop experiments with David Allen in Paris to recover his creative curiosity. In the event, he adapted the tape-loop method itself as the shaping metaphor of his musical realisation of the totalitarian condition Orwell describes, interspersing darkly brilliant loop pieces with short funk rock interludes that conjure the exhilarating taste of freedom attained in the act of resistance. These passages are delivered by a group including John Marshall, Lol Coxhill and Nick Evans. Having tasted freedom, Hopper soon made his escape from a group that now frowned on uninhibited creativity. □

Charts

Playlists from the outer limits

Slow Sound 15

Fennaz
Field Recordings 1985-2002 (Touou)
Darius Marelli
More (Fat Cat)
Carizmo Veloso
Trio E tempo (New Blood)
Hardman
Shine And Prisms (Pop Up)
Deafband/Deafphere
Northern Transformed (Blue Greenhouse)
Diamond/Dangerous/Poncho
Deep Learning (New Blood)
Pennaz
Secret Sleeping Birds (Ee)
Frank Lowe
Four Black Land
Morton Feldman
Waves And Imbalances (Suave)
Maroon/People Like Us/Wobly
White Open Spaces (Gottlieb.net MP3)
Pan American/Kim Hurrey/ISO ed/Cooker/Conboy
Pio Bane Public (Vertical Form)
Daneshka Costello
Together In The New Akeas (Mile Routes)
Gagarin
Exhaling (Soul)
Wine, Lique
Unfree (CD R)
Supersilent
Supersilent & Plane Greenhouse
Sophus Mathias
The Bad Man Live At Mulin (126 comform MP3)

Compiled by Slow Sound System,
info@slowsound.net, www.slowsound.net

Advanced D&D 15

Various CD-R Demos: DJ Shikhan, Dew/Nail, Susan Duren Duren, Sherry, Shes, DJ 100,666,660, Mand CRT
SLD
Discovery (J&J)
Soll Pink Youth
Do You Run? (Soundbix)
Electric Kettle
Faster Caring And Ultra Disappear (Peace Of)
Prince
Purple Rain (Pleasy Pink)
Western Saans
Silhouettes (Synapse Records)
Dustbowl
Stratons (Aesth)
Pink Floyd
Dark Side Of The Moon (SVE)
Logan's Run Original Soundtrack
Film Score (Manding)
CDK&K
Parades (Ad Nostem)
The Beaten
Abbey Road (Capitol)
Trade And Distribution Almanac
Volume 1 (Manding)
Vysar
The Great Russian Audio (SVE Productions)
Vynova
Love, Peace And Poetry: Russian Psychedelic Music (Thornal)
Fan Club Orchestra
San Papa And The Fan Club Orchestra Vols 1 & 2 (SVE)

Compiled by Danna Summer aka Jason Forrest,
Advanced D&D, WFMU 91.1 FM [www.wfmua.org],
Thursdays 2-6 am

Antipoc 15

Bruce Gilbert
This Way (Mand)
Zigzag Karkowski
Consciously Unconscious: Unconsciously Conscious (Mand)
Steve Roden
Reverend Cross (Drone animal)
Tony Corral
Paradise (Sable Of The Elements)
Woot Eyes
Dead Hills (Touliman Unlimited)
Thomas Brinkmann
Trailways (Max Front)
Lincol Marchetti
Tom De Hart (Herd 3 600) (Mand)
The Heat
Lee At Kark (1980) (no label)
Shen Ambush
Mort Ave. Sifters: Gang Of Separation (Shady/Mat)
Maja Rattle
Virus (Gang Greenhouse)
Terr Thewald
Loveborn (Mile Routes)
William Dinkeld
The River (Faster Nuts)
Yabbi You
Dark N To The Top 1959-1979 (SVE And Film)
Starlinkers
Infinite Sessions (DBK Works)
Luc Renard
Far West News (Presented live at the Kitchen, NYC, 13 March 2003)

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10276 1158, USA,
info@antipoc.com, www.antipoc.com

The Office Ambience

Varicus
Flowers In The Wind: Women In Early Country Music
1920-1930 (SVE)
B
Me And Ourselves Down By The Seashore (A Tree
Shrill) (Herd)
The Major Road
Back To The Front (MP3)
Rae Mendon
Reverend For Gostain (Touk)
Minor Threat
Fast Drive Tape (SVE)
Smoghouse
We Can Fix It (Remix) (Vertical Form)
Retail local
Chronic Subliminal (Lullabies) (Touk)
Wells Dr Capras
The Age Old Age Of Old Age (SVE)
Nupties Modulation Systems
Wine To The O Land Where King Is A Child
(SVE)
Prince Paul
Politeness Of The Business (Unlimited)
Arthur Doyle/Sakura/Mustard/Saber Toyonari
Live In Japan 1997 (SVE)
Will Ditcham & David Pajo
Sketch OST (SVE)
Nougat
Turning It Down Since 2001 (Eand)
Castore
Devolution Two (Pashabill)
Zu
Live In Helsinki (SVE)

Compiled by The Slow Sound System

We welcome charts from record shops, radio shows, clubs, DJs, labels, reviewers, readers, etc. Email charts@theshow.co.uk

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X-tract Sculpture Musicale: Dialogues Between Music And Art

Berlin, Germany

Wire: flag: burning

London, UK

Freedom Of The City

London, UK

Godspeed You! Black Emperor +

Jackie O Motherlucker

Québec & Montréal, Canada

Soundcheck

This month's selected CDs, vinyl and singles

With contributions from Derek Bailey and Christian Fennesz, David Sylvian's new record is his most adventurous departure yet. By David Toop

DAVID SYLVIAN BLEMISH

SAMADHI SOUND SOUND085001 CD

The record begins in the dunny, so begins as a record. Not so many recordings begin in rooms at this moment in time; they are not records so much as accumulations of data. Destructive fluctuations of a tube amp, vibrato set to medium speed and high intensity, introduce us into the room space and its atmosphere. No gates, filtering or intrusive EQ; just the box singing to itself. No picked notes; just percussive impact now and then. Another guitar, further distant in the room, erupts in arrested distortion, clipped. The amplifiers speak, or the body of the guitar; frame work rather than systemic framework. "I fall outside of her," David Sylvian sings.

The less "real" silence (the room before and after music happens) surrounding recorded music, the more interesting real silence becomes. We call this atmosphere, the traces of life that we humans know very little about. Rooms and their resonance become magical. In the pauses between notes, brief moments of difference tones, a low frequency bulge in the fabric. "Place the dunny on the roof, slash him a tongue, give him proof." Every sound is close now, or very close: the voice, small blemishes of noise, amp vibrato, a drifting, wavering tone, tiny interferences of digital environments. Nothing is covered, removed, detached, enhanced. The voice is a naked man, seated in a room unadorned except by tremulous, broken sound waves. The room is an ear.

Track two, "The Good Son", begins in another room. "... Vocals," says Derek Bailey, "OK". Nowhere in the index of any book of theory, his chords and intervals move in wayward lines, wave channels through marshland, a logic that just is. A musical timing and turning, nevertheless. Feedback conversation between another guitar and amp hangs at the back of the room. Another kind of line, a shadow of the first. "You know he'll take you but not too far," says David Sylvian. "Always first in line but second to none, the good son." The match is cracked, uncomfortable, a

voice looking for the logic of water in marsh, deep inside the listener's physical discomfort zone. Stripped of soundbite and spit, smooth oiled reassurances, the dialogue makes no concessions to empathy yet unearths a communication. Can we agree that our understanding is fragile and partial, stop pretending that we all want to sing the same song?

Track three, "The Only Daughter", words are chopped, snipped, lost, doubled: "She was, she was, a friend of mine, do us a favour, your one and only warning, please be gone by morning." A faint crackle, distant tones floating in a misted landscape, cuts in the fabric, harsh notes of the way we behave, the room has gone.

Track four, "The Heart Knows Best", pulses, a measured tread on soft ground; an open guitar chord shudders, vibrato turned to slow. The instrument is struck, not plucked. "And the mind's dissuade, but the heart knows better." Is it ever possible to know what these songs mean? Private scenes in rooms, family life, soul drift, ruptures and momentary connections, some faint scent of a breakthrough in personal understanding, how blurred feelings and the lapses of self interfere with clear perception and our sense of the real. "As frequent as street corners in Holborn are these chasms in the continuity of our ways," wrote Virginia Woolf in *Jacob's Room*.

Track five, "She Is Not", resumes the dialogue, a library scene of two philosophers from different schools in search of a common text. Bailey's guitar is spikes piercing the surrounding air. "There she is, among her children, full of paintings." Only 43 seconds, this engagement, like a line written in a notebook.

Track six, "Late Night Shopping", is home video contrast, a Don DeLillo mood moving suddenly out of doors into artificial light, inside a car, nocturnal scenes from a mall, though no journey beyond the room takes place, just the thought of this experience proposed. A mundane chore becomes perverse; the world is inside out. A double-tracked voice, handclaps, a three note bassline, whereby the materials come closest to customary recording studio procedures. In the empty spaces, creaks and squeals that speak the language

of trees in a high wind. "We can take the car, no one will be watching, we can lose ourselves, late night shopping."

Track seven, "How Little We Need To Be Happy", is a third study, how to build song from the non-linear, non-cyclical form of Derek Bailey's improvisations. The voice is conversational, confident within itself yet deeply uncomfortable in this room of shifting floor and window walls. "They removed his voice and the silence overwhelmed him. How little it takes." Thanks to my own conversation with the artist Russell Mills (Sylvian's longtime collaborator), I have a quote, from Susan Sontag: "All art should make us nervous." Bailey is more fulsome, less dry here. Finding a shape for the words is so difficult, sniffing a harmonic implication out of blunted chords that shuffle in line, old men for a few steps, then shatter in mirror shards as if suddenly angry. No endings, no beginnings, no bridges, just raver.

Track eight, "A Fire In The Forest", is the last of this 43'45" record. A record of a point when caution is a paper boat to be thrown into the sea. Beginning with sustained tones, the improvisations of a church organist clouding the empty air just before a funeral unleashes its overwhelming emotions, this could be a song about death and bliss. "There is always sunshine above the grey sky, I will try to find it, yes I will try." This is a song of verses that become choruses. Two chords at a dreaming pace only but such a deep mood of human fallibility, transience, optimism and resolve. At the beginning of the second, or first verse, the sun bursts. A Christian Fennesz arrangement gently underlines the melancholy of ecstasy, sounds from his computer stretched into fine strings that nudge memories of childhood foods: Toffee and melted cheese. "Oh here comes my childhood, a penny for your secrets, it's standing in the window, not out here where it belongs." Too short, too sad, giving up a meaning only reluctantly, the song demands to be played over and over, moving beyond all expectations. Voice shedding a skin. □



AKATOMBRO TRACE ELEMENTS

SWIN W424 CD
BY TOM BRIDGE

An expatriate Scot living in Hiroshima, Paul Kirk's approach to soundtracking his environment is powerful if none too subtle. Essentially he provides a foundation of distorted beats and deep bass over which his layers static, drone, voice and noise samples and swathes of violent electric guitar. Therapeutically, he embraces the clichés associated with themes of ethnic chaos, alienation and culture shock. His music stubbornly forges ahead through a bottle of sampled voices and noises.

For all its relentless, mechanised motion, the dynamics of *Trace Elements*, released on Colin Newman's Swin label, are more rock than electronics. For the most part, it's all feverishly overdriven. "Dry-Loop" and "Hansel" bury traces of folk baroque-style melodicism in distortion and volume, immersing them in disorienting, blackening monotony. Presumably the title's meant to be ironic, because "Incorruptible" sounds anything but, the only element of impetability here being its unyielding momentum. Looping rhythms and samples between the bass-driven "Overheat" and "Bad Cop," but they still make central at a very visible level. The more metallic edge of "Garden" is moderated with oscillating noises and a more subtle deployment of light and shade. "Ponderful" is a jaggerout of percussion and noise samples. The music finally escapes from its earthbound gravitational pull, as the unorthodox distorting drones of "Twisted" subside into the subtle soundwaves of "Passage." It's a neat enough ending, if a little incongruous after all that has gone before.

DOROTHY ASHBY AFRO-HARPING

VOYCE 9688 CD
BY DAVID CRIBBS

Although not as exploratory or avant garde as Alice Coltrane, harpist Dorothy Ashby nevertheless exerted a significant influence on her track in the days when they both worked the Detroit jazz circuit together. Ashby understood that the graceful yet unwieldy instrument could play a role in jazz, especially when it entered its cooler phase. As she said, "The harp has a clean jazz voice with a resonance and syncopation that turn familiar jazz phrasing inside out."

However it was only in the 1960s, when she came under the wing of Richard Evans, a former

journeyman bassist turned arranger for Cadet Records, that she really got the chance to present her already much heralded virtuosity to a wider audience. 1968's *Afro-Harping* has been out of print for many years, with copies changing hands for an excess of £100. Small wonder. It's a richly rewarding, highly accessible collection, a tumid mix of exquisitely scored soul, jazz and funk arrangements over which Ashby's playing flows like an ocean breeze. She plays just off and ahead of the rhythms, floating the groove.

The effect is unorthodox but instantly pleasing. Like a jazz equivalent of Debussy's *Dances Sacrales Et Profanes*, tracks like the opener, the Evans-permeated, threnos-like "Sweet Vibrations" tell emblematic of the times, suggestive of Batman theme composer Neil Hefti in their frequency (his "Lonely Girl" is covered here) and the stately aroma of San Rita's big band arrangements. Evans, incidentally, played with Rita in his early career.

Among the high points are the title track, where Ashby dialogues with Chicago pianist Paul Upchurch, and "Garden," where she gives full vent to her lyrical muse. Only the last track, a cover of Bacharach-David's "The Look Of Love" doesn't quite work, feeling more like a sop to populism than a clever reworking of a standard.

Although further recordings with Evans followed, including 1970's more noisy *The Rubbery Of Dorothy Ashby*, she never quite regained the aural voice she established on *Afro-Harping*. Ashby died out the remainder of her career up to her death in 1986 in preface session work with the likes of Steve Wonder (on "If It's Magic" from *Songs In The Key Of Life*), Earth Wind & Fire and Barry Manilow. With *Afro-Harping*, however, she fleetingly achieved necrotic perfection.

ROBERT ASHLEY

THE WOLFMAN
ALMA MARGHERITA PLANA A SPANISHA CD
BY BRIAN MCCORM

The first significant release by American composer Robert Ashley since 2000's *OUT*, which featured Jean Le Bonbes and regular accompanist, Blue Gene Tenney. The Wolfman catches the younger Ashley at his shepherding, lysergic best. These four tape pieces from 1957, 1960 and 1964 are among the works described by Tenney as 'social behaviour and language illusion studies'.

The Fox is an example of warped Americana. Derived from Bert Lurie's curiously earnest folk

song, its musical component is constructed from a series of piano clusters played both forwards and back, but with the attacks added out. The narrative, delivered in Ashley's typical 'Water Creek' or 'Quebec' drawl, was recorded in a single live pass in a home studio. Crude, then, but unforgettably effective, and certainly more accessible than the somewhat later *The Wolfman*, which was written in the sequel of Martin Feldman when he couldn't find a commission for a vocal piece. Premiered in 1964 at avant garde muse Charlotte Moore's festival of new works in New York, the piece extensively explores feedback. Not just the coloristic squalls that became a part of rock music a few years later, but full-blown feedback of a sort that helps structure the whole aural experience.

The Wolfman Tape is an associated work. It uses tape-speed manipulation and elements of 'found sound' derived from AM radio, creating a strange cocktail party effect that serves as a device for the social performance. Added to that is a coda effecting an abstract commentary on what just preceded it. To jazz less of a certain cast, it may be more familiar as a sound environment for a Bob James ESP recording.

Made somewhat earlier, *The Bottleneck* is the most obvious study of social behaviour. Coming from the same desolate landscape as Ashley's television opera *Perfect Lives*, it was conceived as a soundtrack for George Murnighan's film about a loner who wanders shopping malls searching for employees with a first set return value. Again, Ashley draws strongly on American radio culture, basing his 40 minute wordless monologue on the open circuit hum of 60 Hertz.

These are important additions to the Ashley canon and further evidence that Ann Arbor, Michigan, rivalled New York City and the West Coast as an important centre for the 60s avant garde. Ashley's own health waning – The Wolfman is posthumously reissued to the hearing – comes as a surprise.

GLENN BRANCA

THE ASCENSION
ACUTE ACTORS CD

BY DAVID KEENAN

Originally recorded in 1981 on 99 Records, Glenn Branca's *The Ascension* provides a futuristic snapshot of a transitional moment in the history of New York's downtown music. It represents the first attempt to rebuild on ground previously levelled by No Wave groups Max, Teenage Jesus & The Jerks, Red Transistor and

Branca's own *The Static and Theoretical Girls*.

No Wave was primarily fuelled by profound acts of removal and subtraction, when any overt notions of melody, form and musicianship were stripped out in favour of a more elemental and emotionally direct attack. All substance and no style. No Wave made expressive use of volume and rhythm, with barbed monosyllabic vocals reducing language to primal howls. Yet despite No Wave's aggressively nihilistic stance, most of its players were more self-conscious than first met the eye, their assault on form more deliberate than irritated. No Wave was a signal moment in that it represented a deliberate attempt to fuse volatile elements from various avant garde disciplines with rock aesthetics and a post-punk DIY ethos.

Guitarist and composer Glenn Branca was one of the first of this group of players to fully articulate this best pony. In *No Wave's* watershed form, he drew a new kind of minimalism, one that had more to do with the claustrophobic street noise echoing around the skyscraping sound mirrors of downtown than the meditative headspace of Terry Riley's *A Rainbow in Curved Air*. For *The Ascension*, Branca stuck to the pummeling rhythms and steadily ardent downbeats that characterized No Wave, but added massed guitars, some with multiple strings tuned to the same note. Branca and his then regular group – guitarists Leo Ranaldo, Ned Sublette, David Rosenbloom, bassist Jeffrey Gleason and drummer Stephan Washburn – work through the implications of this approach, still a rock group but now looting an orientalist reach. Tracks like "Lesson No 2" and "The Socratic Commodity" anticipate groups like Sonic Youth (Thurston Moore also passed through Branca's mentor), Swans and Savage Republic, but the title track – a 13 minute instrumental speaking in tongues unknown – remains inimitable.

Between them the four guitarists generate an uneasy torrent, rising through a series of metallic plateaus that dissolve like breath with the sudden shift of a chord. In the eleventhets Leo Ranaldo summons the fact that the guitars were close miked in the studio, claiming that the lack of reverb lessens the recording of the kind of power they were able to channel when agitating the volume of air in a concert hall or club, but it's precisely the music's unyielding quality and eye-level fury that make *The Ascension* out as something else entirely. Call it a Heavy Metal symphony, punk rock minimalism, avant done, whatever you want. It's a beautiful noise.



the posters: the last great wilderness soundtrack / directorsound: redemptive strikes / major studio hash barn: blues de jour
movieforum: first album / future plot aka: salute your soul / distributed by vital / www.geographicmusic.com / www.dominorecordco.com



Getting you morph for your money: Farmers Manual

FARMERS MANUAL

RLA
MEGO 777 DVD VIDEO/ROM

Here they are, then, the group once described as the original digital boy band, purveyors of pop music for the year 4000. Heard and seen up close, though, in this digest of five archive, Farmers Manual look to come from a rather older place and a borderer intellectual tradition. So scroll the calendar back a moment from that optimistic fifth millennium puff. In 1894, Joseph Breuer was falling out with Sigmund Freud over his views on infantile sexuality, arguably the key moment in the evolution of psychoanalysis. Exactly 100 years later, in Freud's own city, Farmers Manual came to life, "unconsciously" of course.

Official constitution followed a year later. Membership is fluid to the extent that local collaboration has always been critical, but the basic line-up remains the same: Matthias Gmahl, Stefan Posselt, Oswald Bertold and later Eugen Danziger and Gert Brantner. In place of the usual five white boys with guitars routine, their schtick is a form of extreme conceptual derangement, "played" on an array of Powerbooks. Some of the philosophy seems to come from James Xenakis's mixed-metaphor approach, music as a bulwark of architecture, and the modern composer as a kind of cosmic pilot, scooting about in free space unhampered by instrumentality.

The Farmers Manual archive now stretches back almost a decade. In developmental terms, the group has remained determinedly locked in an infantile phase of language. What they do is what paediatricians and psycholinguists call jargonism, a perennated but essentially formless stream of articulation. It is music without musical rationale, but with a very definite end-function. In so far as the tirelessly touring group has a manifesto, it is the

radical transformation of "local atmosphere". A typical Farmers Manual performance, and there are now hundreds archived, represents, in their words, "a shift from dissolution and clumsiness through manual change and ecstatic fiddling into an imaginative state of complex monitory, structured calm and chill, or endless associative babbling".

The soundtrack alone – a relatively familiar grammar of sinewy tones, waterdrops and distant, industrial coos – is insufficient to explain what they are about. The DVD features extended footage of the members (I assume) taping away plaster to reveal a recessed plank door covered in mattresses, the door is ripped away and then replaced; a black and white kitten squats anxiously. It is footage which delivers the same "complex monitory" as Dusan Makavejev's film about that other radical Viennese, Wilhelm Reich, called *WR: Mysteries Of The Organism*. The latter makes the same move from clumsiness towards a weird kind of grace that one hears in the group's performances.

These are as hard to quantify and describe as a Nurse With Wound album, but where Steve Stapleton has a discernible roster of musical influences, Farmers Manual appear to have avoided even the faintest oedipal anxieties about where they come from. Their musical language has something of the quality of listening to a young child through a bedroom door and imagining that she has briefly and miraculously mastered Serbo-Croat or Navajo. This is what they mean by associative babbling, but where hypnosis might have provided the key to psychoanalysis, their conduit is portable computer technology. Laptops are educational toys and comforters by turns. The sounds produced and preserved on any of their LPs and EPs – like *No Backup* and the cleverly named *Does Not Compute* (both from 1995) – or indeed the three days and 21 hours' worth of sounds archived on this DVD

Brian Morton spends three days and 21 hours on the couch coming to terms with the Viennese laptopers' audio archives housed on a single DVD

are less important than the conceptual context, which of course can't be reproduced. This is the same tired argument that says you shouldn't record and market free improvisation. Listening to Farmers Manual does effect a change in the "local atmosphere". It is both alienating and oddly reassuring, very much a work of dream logic rather than design.

It's probably cheap and unworthy to underline the group's Viennese roots and thence their complicity in one of the world's great intellectual sleights of hand, but their music does come across as a mischievous sibilator to the unfinished Freudian project. If the unconscious is also structured like a language, here is his singing voice. That said, what Farmers Manual do isn't subversive music, but has a normative and even therapeutic dimension which puts weight firmly on the domestic half of Xenakis's unresolved equation. This is very much a music of intonations and occupied spaces.

In broader terms, it is a perfect example of what the people at Fylkingen in Sweden, who have been sponsoring new forms and practices for 70 uncelebrated years now, call "unestablished art". This doesn't imply "anti-establishment", though it's easy to take that hint, but an art that resists finished form. I can't confidently say what I make of R&A as a document of that near decade of cheerfully arrested development. It's a confused and in some respects unattractive digest of something altogether more free-flowing. In performance, I can tell you that Farmers Manual are a very different though no less enigmatic proposition. The music can often attain thunderous intensity, though more often it concentrates on small and discernible sounds. Members have even been known to nod off on stage, which seems the perfect self-commentary: these are kids who still need the odd nap, and however far afield they go, do their best stuff wrapped up and quilted in familiar things. □

ROB BURGER
LOST PHOTOGRAPH
 T204K TC1719 CD
 BY JOHN GRATCHLEY

Rob Burger is the keyboard and accordion player in the San Francisco-based Tin Hat Trio. For the first outing under his own name, he has swapped his usual partners for the much in demand downtown duo of Greg Cohen on bass and Kenny Wollesen on vibas, drums and percussion. They provide a consistently intense drive throughout the album's showcase for Burger's varied keyboard forays.

He plays accordion, pump organ, piano, prepared and toy piano, celeste, glockenspiel, chamberlin, Hammond organ, music boxes and the intriguingly named monophonic. Burger integrates those elements with a fine ear for textual nuance, revealing an intimate ability to match mood with sound. The album's mood is very substantially although the overall flavor is definitely Eastern European. At times unashamedly romantic, Burger's waltzes and pastiche chansons are distinguished by his penchant for music drama.

Much of the music is brooding and all of it is delicately complex, bearing the hallmarks of his work with Tin Hat. But Cohen and Wollesen are equal partners in this project, driving Burger on to exhibit his outstanding virtuosity. He can derive great power from the accordion, while elsewhere displaying a feather-light delicacy of touch, much in the same way as baroque pianist Oleg Sokolov. Burger produced the album too, and the integrity of his musical vision is evident in the attention he pays to some detail. Adding a prepared piano overlay, toy piano or a music box to the mix keeps things consistently interesting. Burger exploits the characteristics of his major unusual instrumentation to great effect, precisely playing a pump organ's wheeze or a Casio's tiny tones to shape and shade the music.

BURNT SUGAR
THE RITES: CONDUCTIONS
INSPIRED BY STRAVINSKY'S LE
SACRE DU PRINTEMPS
 TH204K PH2040 CD
 BY STEPHEN ROBINSON

According to Greg Tate, founder, leader and conductor of his sprawlingly diverse Getzelm-based ensemble, "Burnt Sugar is a tertiary band, a neo-third thing, a community hang, a society music club aspiring to the condition of all that is mother, glacial, social, spatial, oceanic,

rhythmic, apothecary and telepathic." Do paper at least, let's get it: just about right. Like dense allusion of verbal allusions, associations and references is more than matched by the heavyweight credentials and, at its most engaging, the music itself.

Formed in 1989 around the nucleus of late and Lawrence Davis Morris, the present Burnt Sugar line-up features no fewer than 18 musicians, including four guitarists, three drummers, piano and lead. In addition, there's trumpet Lewis Lip Barnes, from William Parker's Dwellin' Porch House, and turntablist Don Egyptian DJ Muzumskak. The Rites also lists special guests Robert Gibbs and Peter Covey, who between them boast an impressive CV ranging from Aphex/Trip/Trip to Miles Davis to The Rollins Band, Defunkt and Arto Lindsay in their own estimation. Burnt Sugar are a "contemporary version of Miles Davis's *Sketches of Brazil*" with myriad references to a common thread linking Eddy Head, JR Kane, Sun Ra, Jimi Hendrix, etc.

The Rites is Burnt Sugar's third album, and its opening track makes it clear that they're getting closer to delivering on their genre-melding manifesto. Straps spring lively from tuntable glitches, disembodied voices call around guitar and piano, blending kaleidoscopically into a shifting mosaic of textures underpinned by a one-note double bass riff and larval drums. The title's "Conductions" refers to Stravinsky's *Le Sacre Du Printemps*, inspired by Ruch Mirin's system for directing cerebral transmission. If the album fills slots of the fury or bombastic highs of Stravinsky's Rites, under late's guidance Burnt Sugar deploy their Stravinsky-denied thrills with a subtly approaching near euphoric. Their quieter, impressionistic swirls of colours and textures are continually engaging self-fracturing and surprising. But the ensemble has a tendency to march each of these passages into loose improv sections that recurrently fall into the same languid pace, despite the Hippie-like halts dished into them by Peter Covey's guitar. This is a pity, as the album is, for an ensemble, somewhat static unless their only really break in the heavily Miles-inspired closing 17 minute workout, where the conductor's textures and layers finally find a convincing place and the improv finally flows. The album is caught between two opposites: sprawl and intention. With a bit more of both, Burnt Sugar may yet come to inhabit the hallowed space their references invoke.

THE CELESTRIAL COMMUNICATION ORCHESTRA
H.CONRES.57/TRANSCURE BOX
 EREMITA MTE008-043 XCD
 BY DAN WARBURTON

These four discs document the entirety of Alan Silva's 25 piece Celestial Communication Orchestra's two appearances on 24 and 27 May 2001, at the Wirefest Festival in Pischawer, Switzerland. Alan Silva references the resolution passed by the US Congress in 1987 that designated jazz as a "rare and valuable national American treasure" (see Alan Silva interview, *The Wire* 228). The test of that resolution forms the basis of five of the 14 extended tracks here. *Transcure Box* inscribes itself in the CD's discography of epic recordings, from the *Kanaka*-like density of 1969's *Luna Surface* and the following year's *The Seasons* (on BKA Audio) through 1971's neglected masterpiece *My Country* to the swaggy growth of 1982's *Desert Magic*.

In addition to his conduction of the orchestra via shouted cues and hand gestures, Silva guides the music's direction with a minimum of composed passages such as the arching *Messianic* motif of "Scot". That he can harness the collective force of so many strong-willed individuals – a half of these cats are bandleaders in their own right – to create music of such heroic force and structural coherence is a testament to his theoretical rigour and his efforts. And however dense things get, Silva always manages to make himself heard, screaming out the shapes of rhythmic calls for the group to play like a coded Indian guru. But when he's controlling the action from his synthesizer, plugging in new patches that occasionally getting in the way of the other soloists, that quality is a rather mixed blessing. There are a few rough spots, but the overwhelming *Marillion* tenor of the music amply justifies Silva's decision to release both concerts in their entirety.

However, someone along the line ought to have taken the red pen to Matthew Goodrich's somewhat self-indulgent yet, for Silva, indisputably an intelligent essay accompanying the set. This would have lined up space for a brief synopsis of who's playing what where. With no fewer than seven saxophones, three trumpets, and three trombones involved, a few directions on how to differentiate *Salt Mazon* from *Kidd Jordan* wouldn't have hurt. Instead, the

introductions are left to vocalist Jerome Thomas, who on average takes about six minutes to namecheck all the performers. Her lengthy introductions booted each concert, meaning that well over 20 minutes of music here is basically background jamming to accompany a rollcall of free jazz's hall of fame. But, heavily influenced by the dramatic delivery of The Sun Ra Arkestra's late, great Leroi Tyron, Thomas's vocal deconstruction of the resolution itself all inspiring if a little overdone in places, with pianist Bobby Few's delicate arabesques providing punctuation and much-needed harmonic clarification.

Obtainable through the Eremita Website, the four discs are also available in a limited edition of 385 "treasure boxes" signed and hand-numbered by Silva himself. These might present a logistical nightmare for the label, but the treasure boxes handsomely complement Silva's uncompromising artistic vision.

THE CHAP
THE HORSE
 LO RECORDINGS LHM CD4P
 BY TOM RIDGE

The London-based The Chap were originally conceived as Johannes Van Wassenacker's side project to his other group, *Karamazov*. With their debut album, they establish their own offbeat but clearly defined identity. Encompassing electronics, dactyls, a mixture of technologies and unpredictable juxtapositions of noise and melody. The Chap are certainly indebted to *Neurofunk*. But a genuine sense of the absurd differentiates The Chap from their more earnest-sounding contemporaries and precursors. Their originality lies in their ability to make sudden leaps in style and tone, from devious layering of electronic and low sounds into deceptively bland and a genuine sense of the bizarre; from charmed but still recognisable distorted pop, loaded with little fits and ends, to unpredictable combinations of pulse and dissonance.

Amid barages of distortion and twisting *Radio 4* style, they drop sudden furies of just guitar peeling and dry, clipped vocals – "We're not imperial! Turn up your Marshall!" A Norman Whitfield sound/pastiche disintegrates "I Got Flattened By A Pig Farmer", and there's some mad Fifth style guitar blurring on "BITSES", their self-subverting production for wearing so many influences on the outside makes it hard to pin down The Chap's frame of reference. But even as their sophistication requires them to

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I hear you knocking: Keith Rowe (below) and John Tilbury (top)

KEITH ROWE & JOHN TILBURY DUOS FOR DORIS CRISTWILE 1605 2820

This word – improvisation – no longer seems adequate to describe the forms that emerge from playing without a score or pre-determined structure. These categories are invidious anyway, but improvised music history, or that part that has its roots in communality and spontaneity, raises certain expectations in the listener that may have become anachronistic or simply naive. Take *Duos For Doris*, dedicated to Tilbury's mother, who died two days before this recording was made. A double CD containing three long pieces, this is the first duo release by Keith Rowe and John Tilbury, whose musical relationship goes back to a 1965 performance of Cornelius Cardew's *Treatise*.

Two thirds of the post-1961 AMM, Rowe and Tilbury share a profound understanding of the way in which form can emerge from carefully controlled dynamics. Some listeners may suspect a lack of communication or development, though they may be mistaken. For the first piece, over 70 minutes in length, a stable state develops quickly out of quietly fluctuating buzzing tones and a resonant, expectant hum, a conglomeration of brainwaves that immediately and imperceptibly induces the receptivity of deep listening. Tilbury's discrete interventions within the crumbling edges, paranormal knockings and beehive muller of this landscape inevitably evoke memories of

other musics – notably John Cage's works for prepared piano and the solo piano compositions of Morton Feldman.

What both players seem to have achieved is a distillation of their respective languages. Two prepared tones from Tilbury may evoke memories of Cage, yet they go beyond Cage, locating his reinvention of the piano in a contemporary context. As for Rowe, the majority of his sounds no longer have any connection to an identifiable instrument. Perhaps they stem from guitar, perhaps not. The question hardly matters. Physicality is evident – a sound that clearly marks the trajectory of a hand or the passing of some device over amplified or resonant surfaces – but the sound of guitar strings has gone.

What is so striking about these recordings is their sustained mood, vacillating somewhere between a calm through which fresh elements emerge as if growing out of the substratum, and a tension so extreme that any individual sound pierces this calm, whether piano pitch or guitar pick-up noise, shocks the air of the room. Nothing to do with the ears: the skin jumps; hair stands on end. Tilbury's touch is exquisite, either a deep rumbling in the bass that detaches itself momentarily from any sense of human agency, or melodic fragments that float over the music like bell chiming reflecting from the surface of a lake.

A spellbinding atmosphere of restraint is developed, almost frustrated and frustrating in its feeling of withholding. This can be traced to the laminar

In a threnody for John Tilbury's dead mother, two titans of British free music bend the meaning of improvisation to breaking point with paranormal knockings and raging intensity. By David Toop

approach of AMM, dating back to the earliest sessions from the mid-1960s, but there is something unfamiliar, an intensity of concentration on detail, a virtuosity of enabling through which marks appear to emerge on paper rather than being written. When a kind of rage, or grief, collects and gains momentum, as happens 43 minutes into the first piece, the impact is overwhelming. Some distortion is evident in this passage, as Tilbury hammers obsessive chords from the piano and Rowe increases volume to the point of violence, though the technical flaw only adds to the intensity.

Of the two pieces on disc two (none of which have titles), the first begins with a recording of tropical insects and birds, the whistled, whirling frequencies of a short wave radio broadcast and Tilbury's rattling, haphazard high notes. This seems the least focused section of the entire session, yet also a reminder of the two humans involved in the performance and a window out into the world beyond the studio. Within six minutes, an eerie suspended world of groans, knocks and fibrillate pulsations has taken over, again fertile ground for beguiling clusters of muted strings. At moments during the third track, very little is happening except for the piano sustain pedal and amplifier hiss. An ascending four note arpeggio from Tilbury; a thump from Rowe, a scratch, a scrape, even at the barest minimum, this is a record that grips the attention and envelops it completely. □

appear semi-detached, they can't mask the intensity inherent in their music, which peaks in overloaded hysteria.

THE CRAMPS FIENDS OF DOPE ISLAND

UNDISCOVERED ART CD
BY RICHARD HENDERSON

With their first studio album in five years, The Cramps remain true to their original mission. *Fiends Of Dope Island* retrieves and emphasizes the unrelenting and fierce ingenuity of rockabilly, upon which singer Lou Ignelzi marks his signature flourishes: bad behavior, worse intentions and can first attempt to escape the cops. Framing his devious impulses, Poison Ivy Roshark punches out guitar notes with little regard for codified distinctions between lead and rhythm playing.

Zealous record collectors, the Cramps have never hidden their sources of inspiration. Their favorite angles, found at garage and swing music, were often the product of spartan technology and the artists' limited, though fully utilized, musical abilities. Ironically, the Cramps' own albums for the most part have been traded in state of the art studios, and this is their best sounding record to date, due in no small measure to meet Earle Marky. Expanding upon the meticulous sound he helped craft for the Cramps' previous *Phantom*, Marky imbues these tracks with the cavernous miasma of 50s swamp rock. Skip-back echo becomes a fifth member of the group, the membership of a drive-in's asphalt parking lot. Lou's caustic snarl, this echo with head cannons on the chorus of "Dr. Fucker, MD" and Poison Ivy tears off fragmentary phrases with a mind to the possibilities inherent in the delayed sound.

The extended build and release of tension in the motorik "Dopehead Boogie" is built from minimal, fairly Arabic-like teased back and forth, guitar to bass, as the rhythm section rivers toward either a vanishing point or a brick wall. Never before have the group's performances resembled as tightly as they do here.

The Cramps described this idealized network in greater detail with every album they release. Having to this agenda with unswerving dedication, they grant themselves license to lay on images of depravity over pulverized music as thick as anyone can stand. Thankfully, restraint is in short supply throughout the 13 tracks here. When an arrangement stops on a dime, feedback leaks into the brief silences. Lou bays, screams and exhorts his audience to extremes of ill-considered behavior with the intensity of a lost evangelist.

The cartoonish bent of *Fiends Of Dope Island* is undeniable, but there is an honorably transgressive sound. Every selection on this disc works at cross-purposes to conversation, moral imperatives or linear thought. But play this album while browsing Daniel Mann's history of drug geeks. We Who Are Not As Others, and all the music contained herein will ring true in an appropriately unsettling fashion.

DOYLE/MIZUTANI/TOYOZUMI IVE IN JAPAN, 1997

ORION CD/DVD
BY ALAN CUMMINGS

Inspired by sax wizard Arthur Doyle's role in Red Hot Chili's incendiary *Blue Manservant* unit, promoters of his first tour of Japan in 1997

arranged a full cast of rumbles with local guitarists like Kelly Hano and Boredome's Selich Yamamoto. But the most unexpected pick-up group on the tour consisted of hardhitting free jazz drummer Sabu Toyozumi and Takeshi Mizutani, better known as the leader of mysterious free-rock group Les Razes Desushes. Reductive enough to make Jo Slinger and Thomas Pynchon look like shamesale frontlight classes, Mizutani has only released three albums over the past 35 years and his last (and until now, only) guest appearance was on a folk-rock record from 1971. Toyozumi's experience in Masayuki Takayanagi's New Directions group, and with free-breathing saxists like Peter Brötzmann and Kaoru Abe made him an obvious choice.

Last fall proved that heavy saxophone/guitar collaborations can provide visceral thrills, but with a loose canon like Doyle the potential for collateral damage was always going to be high. And indeed on their first meeting, the Japanese players seemed overwager to merely shade in the empty space between the American. Fortunately they weren't so restrained for the rematch several days later — and that is the date documented by outsider Italian label Quico on this gorgeous ink-splashed black, red and orange vinyl double. The sidling first piece opens immediately with an aggressive, take-no-prisoners assault. While Doyle hunkers down hard on his usual mantra-like repeating lines, scraping the back of his lungs through his leaser reed, Mizutani whips out sustained blocks of weighty feedback augmented with scoured rins of wotery notes, over Toyozumi's dynamic, pulsating rhythms. Halfway through, the piece turns into a "blatant struggle" for solo space between Doyle and Mizutani, with Toyozumi doing his best to keep them apart. It's an exhilarating ride, but suspense lingers about the group's ability to cool down.

The second piece, "Alabama And Mississippi Reunited," is a slightly more considered and works better for it. Doyle gives the Japanese players ample space to work up a frantic head of steam before they sink in briefly on the floor, skittering wildly over the top of the rolling engine of sound before leaving off again just to impact the rest of the set with relatively live actual live playing. The highlight is a moody, even subtly moving duo between Doyle's primitive scuzzing and restrained, watchful solo efforts from Mizutani's guitar. If it's not quite the cross-cultural meltdown the billing promises, it's a weirdly fascinating collaboration nonetheless.

DYSRHYTHMIA PRETEST

HELAPRO 9777 CD
BY PHIL FRIEDMAN

The Philadelphia trio Dysrhythmia are not at all the sort of group typically sponsored by the extreme Metal label Repulse. Their blend of post-hardcore bombast and Prog intricacy takes cues from the more spastic end of art Metal, but owes just as much to the musical jazz-ness of the Sonny Sharrock Band or Ronald Shannon Jackson's Decoding Society. With their "top on a dime" changes, guitar barks and occasionally ferocious tempos, Dysrhythmia neatly fit alongside primarily instrumental groups like the Flying Luffenbushes, Octetrum, Rums, Signings and even Lightning Bolt.

Pretest is Dysrhythmia's third release, following 2002's *Contradiction* and 2001's *No*

Inference. It's a little more intricate than *No Inference*, with riffs building frostily rather than following the propulsive grooves that distinguished the last disc. The two-part "Annihilation" suite is the album's high point, particularly "Annihilation I," where Clayton Kengen's throbbing, post-punk bassline booms Kevin Hellagard's scorching "space rock meets punk" guitars. It's unclear how much of this otherworldly music is tested, and how much improvised, but given the quality of the results, it's difficult to care.

If there's a problem with the record, it's that Dysrhythmia don't always have the courage of their convictions. The slow number is a watery jam that goes nowhere, and not in a fun way like Suburbanoid Space. It's also possible to dispute their choice to hire Steve Albini as engineer. His obsessions with huge drum sounds make it almost impossible to hear just how locked-in and unified they really are. Still, on balance, *Pretest* is a superb record by a wordless group with much to say.

FISCHER/STANGASSINGER/ SCHWEIGER WIEN 3

EXTRA PLATE EX1020 CD
BY JOHN CRITCHFIELD

Viennese saxophonist and violinist Michael Fischer's last two recordings — one solo, the other a duo with guitarist Gary Smith — prefigured a move towards a combination of New Music and free improvisation. This recording with Hermann Stangassinger on double bass and Hannes Schwager on drums and percussion could be a culmination of that maneuver.

Fischer is a theorist for whom the need to intellectualize his music acts as the goal or impetus to experiment further. As expressed in the sleeve notes, part of the trio's manifesto sees them defining their work as "an answer to the atrophy of human communication." In musical terms, atrophy is taken to mean a reliance on repetitive and therefore inhibitive forms. Well, the trio are in no danger of falling on this project. They consistently shift their improvisational ground, while maintaining a consistently high level of interaction.

Fortunately, the theorist in Fischer does not lead to the music's cerebral confinement. These thoroughly accessible improvisations demonstrate considerable diversity and lightness of touch. The trio's range allows them to explore a variety of structures and forms, from blasting swarms of drums free improv to highly controlled pieces that showcase Fischer's pianistic virtuosity and Schwager's percussive manipulation. The exploration of the possibilities of new sounds is also high on the collective agenda. As a saxophonist, Fischer has long experimented with multiphonic effects but this CD also allows him free range with his violin. Particularly effective are his slowly bowed and drawn out cracks that literally put the music under stress and duress.

The trio are most effective at creating diversity of mood through what they describe as "new aggregate sounds and nonconformist sound associations." In other words, the combined instrumentation available to this new trio allows them to examine new ground while reinforcing some already existing conventions. "Lullator



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HENRY GRIMES TRIO THE CALL OUT BACK CATHODES CD HY KOWIN POUNCEY

The recent discovery that Albert Ayler's bass player Henry Grimes has survived and is living in Los Angeles, albeit slightly disoriented from his self imposed 30 year seclusion, was for many 60s free jazz followers one of last year's highlights. For those who have only become aware of Grimes's existence by reading Marshall Marzette's interview with him (The Wire 227), Italian label Gato Back's release of *The Call* — as part of their ongoing ESP-Disk reissue programme — is timely.

Recorded on 28 December 1965, *The Call* sees the Philadelphia born bassist leading a trio with drummer Ben Price and Perry Robinson on clarinet through a session that remains remarkably fresh and burning with invention. Much of the credit belongs to Robinson, who explores every aspect of his instrument to create a varied and exciting panorama of sounds. These range from marching band explosions merged with also saxophone and bird call imitations, to snare-drumming drones. There's an almost naive simplicity about this music, with Robinson's clarinet repetitively filling like a blackbird guarding its nest, while Price ricochets around it in its background and Grimes elegantly explores the full range of his bass without disturbing the rhythmic drive of his fellow players.

When Grimes takes a solo towards the end of "For Django", he plays it cool, bowing and plucking at his bass with a precision that sits satisfyingly into the frame of his companion. No doubt a few of the new breed of free jazz players heard *The Call* in its original issue, particularly William Parker. Three decades on, Grimes's musical shot to the world has lost none of its original power.

MICHAEL HARRISON REVELATION: MUSIC FOR THE HARMONICALLY TUNED PIANO MICHAEL HARRISON MUSIC NO NUMBER CD BY MARCUS BOON

New York based composer/pianist Michael Harrison cut his teeth as La Monte Young's piano player for *The Well Tuned Piano* in the 1980s. He is the only pianist, aside from Young, authorized to perform this epic piece. A longtime student of the late Indian rag master Pandit Pran Nath, and, more recently, Ustad Masit Khan, Harrison has continued Young's exploration of just intonation on a specially redesigned "harmonic piano" with a pedal to modulate pitches around any key, allowing the piano to play 24 pitches per octave. This customised instrument uses only a single string per note (in contrast to the three on a regular piano) giving a harp-like effect that was heard to great effect on Harrison's debut, 1992's *From Ancient Worlds*.

In contrast to that CD's delicate orientalism, *Revelation*, a live recording made in 2001 at New York's Lincoln Center, has more in common with Young's piano works, in particular the "tone clouds" discovered in *The Well Tuned Piano*. These are basically clusters of pitches played together

rapidly with both hands to form a chord-like matrix which stretches out in time in an almost drone-like fashion. Used with just intonation tuning, the technique produces remarkable sets of overtones as the pitches resonate with each other, building into a pulsating, shimmering wall of sound in which all kinds of ghost-like sound effects and structures appear.

Although the effect best heard live since it is an acoustic phenomenon, the CD captures the strange beauty of just intonation, allowing the listener to experience the way notes that initially sound 'out of tune' become compelling as the ear 'intunes' itself away from the murky approximations of conventional Western equal tempered tuning back towards perfect pitch. In particular, *Revelation* sets out to emancipate the comma — the tiny excess of pitch in natural tuning systems which Western equal temperament sought to tame through its insistence on regular intervals.

A formidable pianist, Harrison's playing is less jazzy than Young's, but he shares with his teacher a fascination with recording form and impression through high-like structures, which beckon towards an unexplored universe of sound relationships.

HUGH HOPPER JAZZ LOOPS BURNING SHEET NO NUMBER CD BY JAZZMAN CHAM

After meeting Terry Riley in Paris early in the 1980s, David Allen started exploring the potential of tape loops. When Hugh Hopper joined Allen in France, he became involved in their investigations of cyclical composition. In 1969, in *Soft Machine* with Mike Rutledge, Robert Wyatt and engineer Bob Woodford, Hopper used looping techniques to make a soundtrack for Peter Dinkley's multimedia show *Speed*, a recording of which eventually surfaced as a Curlew CD in 1996. In 1972, on his departure from *Soft Machine*, Hopper made the album 1984, a more concentrated and imaginative collection of tape loop techniques, which has become increasingly impressive with the passage of years and the steady spread of its influence.

Computer technology has revolutionised the procedure, cutting out lots of the awkward guff, but shared manipulation of periodicity still yields fascinating results. *Jazz Loops*, a turn-to-order release from the German-based Burning Shed operation, was assembled 2001-2 Kent, UK. Hopper has plundered his personal archive of recordings and concocted a series of captivating extended pieces based on resonance and overlap. The source material features a gang of old friends, including saxophonists Ron Dean, Didier Malherbe, Simon Peard and Pierre-Olivier Gouri, drummers Jim Marshall and Nigel Morris, guitarist Patrice Meyer and Robert Wyatt's voice and piano. Hopper appears on most tracks too, playing guitar and Hammond organ as well as his wonderfully deep signature bass.

"Jazz" broadly designates the flavor, but here the word encompasses a spectrum of styles and moods from swirling ambient orients to irresistible shuffling funk. Hopper has long been a composer of texture and atmosphere, and his engineers these aspects expertly on the disc's 11 tracks. The music is melodiously patterned yet alive with asprays Varian figures and

emphatic emerge and grow within the repetitive flow and groove. It has predictable points of reference — *Soft Machine*, Terry Riley, Blotches Brew, Larry Graham — yet Hopper's overarching personal stamp and fine judgement render it perfectly new and new with a hint of what comes next.

UTAH KAWASAKI UTAH.MOD.RADI UTAH 1988 CD BY BRIAN MARLEY

In the West, analogue synthesizer player Utah Kawasaki is perhaps best known for *Asio Twin*, his microcosmic sound due with 'howling voices' vocal artist Ami Yoshida. Moreglobe, his trio with guitarists Taki Sugimoto and Tetsu Akiyama, made the quite influential *At Penguin House CD*. But this activity is just the tip of a very large iceberg. Since 1994, Kawasaki has issued a slew of music on cassette, almost all of which is solo exploration. Work in progress, you might say, except that the results belie his youth and inexperience.

Utah.mod is a selection of the pieces he made at home between 1994 and 1995, with the exception of one track recorded especially for this release with fellow electronic musician Tetsu Yuraaga, both of whom are mainstays of the group *Musma*. I sometimes wonder whether musicians are obliged to become improvisers nowadays simply because the hidebound world of composition fails to comprehend their media output. On the evidence of *Utah.mod*, Kawasaki is a composer, though improvisation is the forum in which his work is most often presented. His electronic soundscapes differ markedly from those of, say, Kitaro Sasano and Jonathan Harvey, in which delicate sometimes shades into prosaism, but Verice and Xenakis would have greatly appreciated this sculptural relationship to sound. The improviser whose work is most like Kawasaki's is Thomas Lehn, especially Lehn's solo CD, *Foamstars*.

The 33 tracks on *Utah.mod* run from between 17 seconds and 11 minutes, though most are of three minutes' duration or less. Because the gaps between tracks are often minuscule, the CD seems purpose-built for shuffle play. In fact, I'd recommend it — not because Kawasaki hasn't programmed the pieces well, simply because they're kaleidoscopic and suggestive of multiple developments, and a fixed format limits the potential composite experience that *Utah.mod* itself is capable of generating.

RAHSAAN ROLAND KIRK COMPLIMENTS OF THE MYSTERIOUS PHANTOM HYPER TWP911 CD BY DEN WATSON

This release documents the legendary multi-saxophone baritone/tenor Roland Kirk live at the Backdoor, San Diego State University, on 5 November 1974. Joel Dom supplies eleven hours, his unabashed enthusiasm and ribaldry allows welcome in the over-reverent church of American jazz. Dom produced all Kirk's albums from 1965 onwards, but he commands this recording as the best example of who and what Roland Kirk was on any given night. He included a mock biography of "the Mysterious Phantom" and a letter (referring to "the imbecile Dom") handing

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tenacity and suggestion. And then's still room for the occasional frenetic, cathartic squall.

MILLSART
EVERY DOG HAS ITS DAY VOL 4
ANORAK RECORDS
BY KEN HOLMES

An awe, should anyone forget, into lines of opposing force. It's the most basic component of the vortex, its simplest schematic. Without that understanding, it simply remains a line. In the same way, Detroit techno collective Underground Resistance would never have amounted to more than a radical corporate logo, were it not for the involvement of composers, strategists and visionaries such as Mike Banks, Jeff Mills and Robert Hood. A nameless assemblage in constant motion, it compressed dots, or its extreme absence, into the purest forms of energy.

Celebrating honesty as a state of mind and a condition of existence, the latest installment of Millsart's *Every Dog Has Its Day* sequence comes as a special limited edition 12" double pack pressed onto 180 gram vinyl, which is probably the most weight this gaudy-deck selection of compositions is ever likely to carry. Cells and sequences are neatly dissected and balanced against each other, beats rebound and keyboards tumble into exhilarating feedback. This is Jeff Mills at his most beguiling and inventive, telling us chance that being honest means having nothing to prove for once, and it all works quite beautifully.

Responsible for volume two of the influential Waveform Transmission series, Underground Resistance's former minister of information Robert Hood is back with a new project for Planet's Logistics label. Available in different formats, with widely divergent track listings, from three track vinyl EP to 11 track CD efforts, Monobox is about nanotechnology writ large as magic. The structures are broad, the spaces between, this is impressive. "The Conductor" and "Elements" are exercises in disciplined momentum, while "Down Town" offers a stark reminder of what techno can do once it's got jacked into the system. Resistance can operate as a line of force too.

MOLASSES
A SLOW MESSE
FANCY FANCY DISCS 3002
BY EDWIN FOUNCIEY

For their third sprawling selection of Bible beat songs and instrumental passages, Montreal based seven piece Molasses have come up with their most elaborate package so far. The two CDs making up *A Slow Messe* are tightly squeezed under a double gatefold sleeve, each with a separate fully illustrated booklet of lyrics and recording information. These are packaged inside a separate printed envelope showing the outline of an x-rayed church that looks like it has come straight out of one of Edgar Allan Poe's Gothic tales of American horror. Lead vocalist and songwriter Scott Chernoff's heartfelt delivery of the material only adds to the feeling of creeping doom resonating through this latest recording. Sounding drained and full of despair, Chernoff's somber style occasionally recalls the early work of fellow Montreal artist Leonard Cohen. Only

Cohen's touch of sardonic humor and pathos is starkly absent here. Because Chernoff's delivery is almost monotonous, it is difficult to focus on what he is attempting to convey through the two overlong discs.

At one point, however, the central character from Flannery O'Connor's *Milkweed* novel suddenly looms into view and begins to preach his heavily turned gospel of self denial and chastisement. The pseudo-religious theme is further illustrated by the music, performed by a group augmented by members from Godspeed You! Black Emperor. The Salvation Army styled jug band which unexpectedly emerges from the blackness throughout the set temporarily lifts the bleakness, giving fresh hope that the rest of the record will move in a new direction.

That never happens, but by now the steady drip of Molasses's music adds a hint of subtle sweetness. *A Slow Messe* is far too long and involved for its own good, but it's a weird and insidious work that deserves attention.

GÜNTER MÜLLER & OTOMO YOSHIMIDE
TIME TRAVEL
ENTWHAILE 009 CD
BY BRIAN MARLEY

Time is, of course, a key constituent of music. But this CD appreciates one particular aspect of time: the period of stasis during long-haul flights when time zones are crossed and hours are lost or gained in the blink of an eye. Using minimalist recording techniques and mostly self-generated sounds, Günter Müller recycles sonic material and embellishes it intriguingly. He filters a select past into the perpetual present, thereby influencing future developments. In every respect he's a quality improviser, alert to the moment and what the music requires.

Günter Müller and Otomo Yoshimide live in common a selfless, antipodal of improvisers. When they met in performance for the first time, at Entwhaile's AMPLIFY 2002 festival in Tokyo last year, their sets were lighthearted with bold ideas and dramatic developments. How interesting, therefore, to hear the CD, recorded just a couple of days earlier, in which a very different, though every bit as fascinating aspect of their musical relationship is revealed.

Although Otomo has departed his skills as an electric guitarist, it would be unwise to take him at his word. His technique may be limited, but his musicality and imagination are not. He peppers Müller's shifting array of patterns and textures with open chords and single chiming notes, and the duo makes his music is addictive, especially when Otomo vocalises the soundscapes with flowing clouds of feedback.

This is Müller's fourth release on Entwhaile, three of which are among the best items in the catalogue. This is one of them. The way he uses sound reveals his origins as a percussionist, though he nearly always implies rhythms rather than stating them outright, and his preference is for irregular pulses and overlapping waves of sound. Something of these qualities can be heard on every track on *Time Travel*, but especially in "Mystery D1", which conveys the feeling of drifting off to sleep then jerking awake for a few deliciously disorienting moments, before the process begins all over again.

MAX NEUHAUS/JOHN CAGE
FONSTANA MIX: FEED
ALMA MARGHERITA PIANO 16RM0400 CD
BY BRIAN MORTON

Totally born Max Neuhäus is a utopian in the strictest sense of the word. His creative mission has always been based on the conviction that our sense of space – the foundation of utopian – is based on sound as well as sight. In the 1960s and 70s, as well as giving solo performances that required the transport of almost a ton of percussion instruments, he helped pioneer live electronic performance. Between 1965-68, he gave a series of live realisations of John Cage's *Fonstana Mix*, an electronic score that allows for an infinity of possible mappings. Live Robert Ashley, he became fascinated by the structural possibilities of acoustic feedback, perhaps the ultimate in chance or unplanned sound.

In the very early 1980s, apart from John Cage's use of phonograph cartridges, live electronic music did not exist. Neuhäus's practice was to lay contact microphones on top of large kettle drums without tying them to create acoustic feedback loops which, because of the shifting position of the microphones, had a distally layered spatial quality. This in turn was affected by the acoustic of the performance space, which in these performances ranges from Carnegie Hall in New York to the studios of Columbia Records and West Deutsche Rundfunk.

It is as difficult to generalise about his very different realisations as it is to describe them specifically to what extent these works communicate any more than two-dimensionally on CD is questionable. The best advice is to move the loudspeakers as far apart as possible and increase the volume dramatically. This reveals the exponentially broadening spectrum of detail with each cycle of amplification. But to be honest, it does little justice to the immense subtlety of Neuhäus's live mix. The 1969 performance from the ZUJ festival in Madrid and the equally celebrated recital from earlier that same year at the New School of Social Research both became lost in an undertheorized wash of sound. The two studio realisations are more subtle, but perhaps lack a sense of drama and presence.

Shrill, strident, these are major documents in the development of American electronic music and they're an overdue acknowledgement of Neuhäus's significance. Along with David Tudor, Nam June Paik and Charlotte Moorman, he is one of the most sympathetic interpreters of the Cage philosophy. Anyone remotely interested in this period should take notice.

PHILL NIBLOCK
TOUCH FOOD
TOUCH TONES CD
BY DAVID STUBBS

Phill Niblock is perhaps the least known exponent of the minimalist tradition. A relative lack of recorded output has denied him the attention afforded to the likes of La Monte Young and Steve Reich, although a British concert in 1984, organised by Black British, did boost his profile on the shores. He is arguably the most minimal of the minimalists – he makes Ray Pryor sound like Mike Oldfield by comparison. Niblock requires the listener to re-evaluate

their relation with music in space and time. At first acquaintance with *Touch Food*, a double CD collection, each piece seems to consist of his holding a single, albeit multilayered note or chord which 'goes' nowhere. It merely hovers for anything up to 20 minutes like some gigantic UFO overhead, before dying away. Once you get inside this music rather than observe it with bemusement, the effect is rapturous and -- well, neutral.

Niblock achieves his effects through multi-tracking of live and processed tracks and sampling, all based on original performances on acoustic instruments. He creates an aural illusion of continuity, like the perpetual gush of a waterfall, for instance. In reality his ingenious layering methods mean that all kinds of infinitesimal but crucial structural and sonic shifts are taking place on a cumulative basis.

The names of the pieces is arbitrary, based on puns on the names of the players or the note they're playing. In "Jelly Roll," based around Ulrich Wagner's baritone saxophone, is the most dense and seemingly archanging of these pieces, a formidable challenge for the novice "Sweet Potato," featuring Carol Robinson on bass clarinet, bassist Han and Eli clannet is marginally looser, the winetone more tangible, the warring bass thrills like a solemn chorus of foghorns, or male saxes "Yam Most May," featuring Kaspar Toppitz on electric bass, lists and lurches like a looped record from Gavin Bryner's *The Sinking Of The Titanic*. Press the CD fast-forward button, however, and, like one of those time-delay shots of flowers opening and closing, you'll get a surprising sense of its musical evolution.

Most aware of all is "Piano-Find 70", initially intended as a 75-minute piano piece but, because the composer is 70 this year and "became a little tired after 70 minutes", it stops there. Divided up into five segments, it is performed with a single nylon string tied to a single piano string, "stroked with Rosin fingers" And yet, once processed, its multiple sonic effects, both real and the result of what you might call a trompe l'oeille, are immense, examining the entire sky like a Heavenly host. Noliroot recommends you play his music loud, which always seems like cheating to me, but this truly benefits from being coaxed up. It's like the end of the world.

BENGT FRIPPE NORDSTRÖM
THE ENVIRONMENTAL
CONTROL OFFICE

AYLER 001/002 2AC
BY JULIAN CHURLEY

Swedish jazz outsider Bengt Frjpe Nordström died in 2000. He had taken up the clarinet after hearing Tony Scott, and tenor saxophone after hearing Sonny Rollins. Then exposure to the music of Ornette Coleman and especially Albert Ayler turned him towards less regulated spontaneity and the isolation of solo concerts and small edition, self-released records.

2000, drummer Peeter Uuskyla and violinist Lars Svartesson. It was the last time the quartet met.

The first disc features a sprawling 90 minute improvisation that speaks of Ayler's influence from the opening burst of weighty wails. It's a curious kind of freedom that is so circumscribed by homage, and Nordström rarely matches Ayler's raw force. Still, beyond the mannered copying of earthy howls and righteous tremors, he also touches on the Ayler spirit. He has real feeling for the richness of his instrument's sound and an aptitude for piecing together fragments into open-ended solos, packed with allusions to folk music and children's songs.

Sartorius makes me lively folk to the tenor's bulk. His presence may suggest a parallel to Ayler's inclusion of violinist Michael Sarason in his ensemble sound. This quartet is more inclined to dip into minimalist methods and techniques to assist the music, rather than the tenor's usual style. On the second disc, which opens with a version of Tony Scott's "Swinging in Sweden," Nordström breathes his vigor to the clarinet and allows small eccentricities to creep into his orbit around the horn. On "Frisping," he passes the instrument further out, guided by Sartorius' break and improvisation. The music is more relaxed and fluid. Unlike at this point several too comfortable making time, running in a little too effectively. For the concluding "Gasping," Nordström returns to tenor and Ayler's ghost stalks once more through the music. Overall, a welcome opportunity to hear an overlooked session playing with commitment and power, but the music's collectability taken would have intensified his impact.

NUCLEUS
LIVE IN BREMEN

UNIFORM RING 170N174 2900
BY BILL SHOFMAKER

A British soldier formed by trumpet/bugle player John Carr in 1969, Nucleus were articulating their own take on the fusion of jazz and rock before Bitches Brew hit the streets, a key difference between the British unit and their Stateside counterparts was their attack, which was markedly less alloyed by jazz practice. Though the front line of Carr and saxophonist/clarinet Brian Smith had considerable jazz experience – Carr in particular had not altogether escaped the long arm of Miles Davis – Nucleus were noticeably if not patently seeking a rock credibility in their continuities, largely groove-driven acts. Perhaps the most telling measure of their access is the subsequent recruitment of drummer John Marshall and keyboardist/organist player Kaye Wiggins, both of whom were born in the 1940s, 1941 and 1943 respectively, of the 1971-1972 period covered by Radio Bremen. Nucleus had topped three albums and their recordings were listed as *contemporary jazz* by both

This is not to suggest that Nucleus did not put elements of advanced jazz and free improvisation into the mix. Though their themes may sound quaint by today's standards, they had some of the same sly syntax of the tunes Joe Zaveinal contributed to the Cannonball Adderley book before he left to join Miles. Nucleus were also very adept in superheating the material's and adopting the resulting molten sound, particularly Smith, whose work was on a par with the likes of Joe Farrell and Owen Listerman. And

they were not shy about venturing into free interpretation, their forays often signalled by Jenkins's obols. The results were sufficiently bristling, as is the case with Jenkins's exchange with Marshall and guitarist Ray Russell opening the second CD. However, unlike some of their American contemporaries – mostly notably the original edition of *Weather Report* – Nucleus did not let these more daring aspects stand on their own, choosing instead to use them as snow connecting lengths, jams.

Unfortunately, the departure of Jenkins and Marshall left Nucleus a decidedly more inert unit, which is perhaps why they lasted into into the 1980s. For a few years, however, Nucleus contributed substantially to the creative chain reaction that, initially, was fusion, the merits of which are very well represented by Lee in Bremen.

FRANK PAHL
THE BACK OF BEYOND

NOVEL CELL POEM NCP16 CD
BY DAVE MANDL

On *The Back of Beyond*, composer and multi-instrumentalist Frank Pahl further explores some of the territory he staked out on *Musica For Desserts*, his recent collaboration with the French toy-pop group Klumpen. Alternating tracks on *Beyond* feature Pahl's 'automated' — instruments driven by jerry-rigged electronic and analogue devices to produce creaky, semi-automated melodic and rhythmic patterns for Pahl to work against.

He also continues to supplement his 'real' instruments with primitive soundmakers and assorted thrift store finds – including toy piano, doorbell, toy hardy-gurdy and “\$2, three-stringed uk!” But the music on *Beyond* is darker and more brooding than that on *Desserts*. Where the tunes on the *Klimpese* collaboration tended to foreground tinkly, pointillist percussion and other childlike sounds, this solo release is dominated by the drones and long *kujato* notes of harmoniums, clarinets, harmonicas, and autoharps.

The tempos are often exaggeratedly slow, most obviously on Pahl's halting cover of "Good Old Days," the normally boisterous theme from his 1930s radio series *See the Little Rascals*. For a composer/musician of such prodigious energy, Pahl's work on *Beyond* is surprisingly languid, even lush in spirit. But, while focusing less — or less often! — on rhythm, Beyoncé displays the same mastery of texture and harmony as his earlier work. The same palette is vast, and the production is lush and shimmering. Pahl also continues to show a distinct fondness for unusual instrumental juxtapositions, like harmonium/African harp/tenor guitar, or chimney/air organ/cello, and the surprising dissonances they produce. He is able to construct beautiful soundscapes out of any conceivable agglomeration of instruments. The compositions on *Beyond* are almost impossible to criticize in any way, or aesthetically.

CHARLEMAGNE PALESTINE IN MID-AIR

ALGA MARGHEN TOPMIN 047 CE
BY RYAN MAULEY

One of the most appealing aspects of Charlemagne Palestine's music is how steadfastly it resists categorisation. His so-called minimalism is actually rather maximal. His

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Soundcheck

drones operate like none you've heard before, his electronics—as heard on *In Mid-Air*—are of a different order from the assembly-studio work produced by his peers during the late 1960s. If he's part of a tradition, it's one largely of his own making. That's appropriate for a man who made the leap of imagination from plain old Charles Martin to the altogether more flamboyant *Chadwick* Paradise.

His live compositions on *In Mid-Air* were made between 1965 (or 1967) the booklet gives conflicting dates) and 1970 at the New York University Intermedia Center, where Palestine was given access to Don Buchla's modular 100 and 200 systems, courtesy of Morton Subotnick. Each of the compositions is a blend of eclectic site tones coloured and impregnated with noise. Each is referred to as a late night electronic serenity—recorded at night to minimise sound penetration from the dangerous world outside the studio. Musicians working nowadays with drones and primitive electronics have the weight of history on their shoulders, and that factor

alone can stifle creativity. But Palestine was intent on writing history rather than learning from it, and his unique brand of experimentation was soon producing good results. When first listened to, these compositions appear simple, almost naive, but they're nothing of the sort. The drones thicken, thin and gush; they alter in colour and weight; their characteristics are constantly, almost imperceptibly, changing. The music sometimes seems to bring molecules in the air while working as busily as a hummingbird.

In the early 70s, Palestine's music became increasingly, sometimes violently, ritualistic. Aspects of it overlapped with performance art, and his instrument of choice became the zane. At the end of the decade, for some 15 years, he withdrew almost entirely from music, disgusted by "the commercial minimalism of Reich, Glass, Adams; lots of this curly New Age composers who were diluting minimal piano music to Richard Gaydosman-like spiritual prancing". His star briefly waned, but now it has risen. *In Mid-Air* is a volume three of *Alja Maughan's* Golden Series series,

and drawn from Palestine's personal archive. To my knowledge, none of this material has previously been issued. We're lucky, finally, to be able to hear it.

PO/GYPT GORE/BURNS, CALOIA & HEWARD/BALAI MECANIQUE MONTREAL FREE! NO TYPE INT 330000-4K02 BY JULIAN COWLEY

This is a hefty slab of the impressive from Montreal, and electric guitarist and arch-catalyst Sam Shalabi is in the thick of it. It's less a compilation sampler than an archive of what's current, featuring four groups, each occupying an entire CD. Shalabi plays on three discs and, although vexed by his psychedelic excursions and megalic flights with the group Shalabi Effect Inc., he's the melodic reference, the non-persuasive, non-absorbent attack of his rock improving that sometimes most tellingly into these freer forms. The name Po stands for "provocative

operations". It alludes presumably to psychologist Edward De Bono's concept of calculated jolts delivered to unaccepting habitual ways of thinking and perceiving. As jobs go, these seven improvisations by Shalabi, his fellow guitarist Rami Wers, double bassist Alexandre St-Onge and drummer John Heward are easy to take. The guitarists chip away, flouting the music's surface with stunningly delicate sounds, or unrelenting coded lines in vast spirals. St-Onge slanders strings and works with springiness and the ebb and flow of tension. Heward scours his kit for complementary timbres. Weiss preps his instrument for added metal edge. Typically the music proceeds with a kind of collective tumbling roll, a revolving mesh of curiously coordinated sounds.

Gypt Goe is Shalabi with Napalm Jazz saxophonist Philémon, Double bassist Thierry Amar joins them on two tracks. Andrew Dickson adds second guitar to two others. As a duo they specialise in agitation, marking out parallel trails of nervous energy as they scuffle along without

Size Matters

3", 7", 10" and other misshapen formats

You can never really get enough contact mic recordings, so you should be damn pleased to see your hands on *Bea Eaton's* *Drone* (Stretching Master M705 7"). Comprised entirely of manipulated contact mic recordings, the three tracks here allow different flavours of noise coding to move around and over themselves like sheets of fury that crawl with life. Layered, waxy at times, thick at others, they create ghostly interior landscapes that are really great. Everything breaks apart like china dishes, then comes back together like velvet meat. (B2)

All those in favour of acoustic guitar and electronics (a really nice combination) should be well pleased by Precursors (Meloktronik WEK005 7") by Greg Davis. There's strumming, bridging and all kinds of crackly grunt on the A side. Evolving from the noisiness into the bucolic, it is a sweet trip. The B side is more reflective throughout, being not unlike a slowed-down version of some of the things that John Fahey tried out with Cui De Sac's Glenn Jones, although this version is not far from some kind of trike-fiddle. Good tracks, but still. (B2)

Black by *Red Hattings* (Beta-Lactam M7015 10") is a pretty nice package, coming with a record of thirty industrial mungs from Hattings, plus a bonus CD with a QuikTime movie by John-Mark and Lauren Lupton. The music is guitar-based, and has slow mythic overtones, almost like some imaginary late-middle period of The Swans. The movie is a black and white thing with heavily ominous webbing and camera angles doubly enough to recall David Aronoff. There are also two musical trailers, the CD, one of which sounds a bit like the last dinner party I did not attend. (B2)

Must-see packaging this time must be *Hip To Be Square* (Some Syrup No Number 8")

by *Instruction Shalabi* (aka Boris Christopher). This combines a late-dot square B" record with a little built-in yourself laptop displaying a Turkish-like shudder of space dissolution that you can change for each of the record's four tracks. The music is nice, garage-electronic stuff. Neither as droney or plinky as I expected, and filled with nice disturbing noises that rise out of the background huzz like the meat will alien rabbits imaginable. But I get the feeling that your average creature is going last longer than this zany, so handle it carefully. (B2)

Two great labels. Two great groups are not exactly the subtitle of *Miklós 2* (Sole As Milk/Meloktronik SAMV101/MEK003 7") but it could be *Phenograph*, a fine Norwegian laptop outfit, have one side—"Bees They Will Sting You", a really cool wall of murmuring metal electronic dronings pushed into a very reasonable, somewhat eastern-sounding form. *Leeds's Vibration Cathedral Orchestra* weave their traditional magic on the other side. It is a portable petty sort of slow string cluck, wheezing keys, rubbed guitars and general open-door drum-bunchery. (B2)

Reichman's new record, *Nguzua M74*—Schubert (Stretching Master M704 7") stays pretty far away from their House noise. The A side creates a ballad sound and very noise-added wall of storm and faveful sounds. And the two of tracks on the B side go all over the place, from free jazz chattering through other more spaced and cryptic approaches to extreme non-danceability. (B2)

Perhaps it's immoral for me to review the *Some Syrup* (Stretching Master No Number 7") since my

didn't get any too far along it either, so while the hell? This would have been a pretty much annoying record if it had used loaded grooves, but it's not un-enjoying the way it is. And if anyone can pick out the tracks by, say, *Alan Licht* or *Christina Carter* or *Mercure*, well, I'll eat a shoe. (B2)

At (pronounced "three", I guess), is a new comp that celebrates the third birthday of its label (Beta-Lactam Ring BENR003 7"). It has one track each by *St. Sébastien*, *Van Deuren*, *Organization* and *Reynolds*, and all four of them are top notch slaps of instrumental weirdness. From the clinking space drones of *St. Sébastien* to the swirling edge of Reynolds' feedback-weaving, it's a goddamn candle-blowing carnival from start to finish. (B2)

Trum's curve at (Beta-Lactam TOR0010") is another great 10" in the label's Lactamase sequence. Trum is the operational name used by Strin, the man behind Germany's Drone label. The music consists of big lowly layers of sounds that are whipped across each other's surfaces like hot desert wind. Some parts are a kind of loop and arid, and other parts are a kind of loop in on themselves like big organic sculptures made out of sand-clotted wax. The second side is built around a kind of machine percussion track that sounds like some swell event being held far off in the distance, but don't worry, you can see everything from here. (B2)

Wolkien is a collaboration between Joris van Perlo and his Bix, who mix together electronics and samples of more earth-based instruments. *Bonzage/Dagmar* (Stretching Master M7003) manages to keep a fairly high level of forced excess without allowing itself to move into best territory. At times the sound collages from "Bonzage" feel as though they're going to wear too far in that direction, but they always pull back and raise the anarchy level a couple of

notches. And "Dagmar" is more like the soundtrack to a walk on the surface of Mars, as imagined by Scooby Doo. It's pretty cool. And spookily, too. (B2)

Mercure's *Timehunter* (Ant-Zen AG106 403") comes packaged in a fine looking black leather Filofax and features six tracks across four discs, all exercises in annihilating time with hallucinatory spatial poetics. Most tracks are assembled from the same kind of rhythmic base that anchored much of 2002's *Mercure*, with fat kick drums and cocaine-blurred leads filled from Maximal Afro's favourite 1970s hardcores and fed on metal filigree. "Whorl" takes up the whole of disc one, with rubbery sub-bass navigating a blizzard of digital snow as an enlarged guitar part is pulled apart with slow juggernaut force. Halfway through, the track coaxes into the kind of oblivion splendored gain that the Boredoms have spent their last few discs chasing down. For the time limiters inherent in the 3" format, "Whorl" is so zoned that after it's all over it's almost impossible to tell how long you've been away. Disc two's "Space Walker" gets a cook-off rhythm against bands of spectrum-scattering noise, rising and dipping with the unreluctant logic of bookish snippets, while "Rainwater", on disc three, is *Mercure* at his most as-shaking and linear. "Stone The Bird" sounds like Sonic Youth's *Bea Moon Rising* but drenched and weighed down with bricks, its declared guitars leaping huge catapillar tracks that are further excavated by the crash of a cheap drum kit sounding a flat march to noise. Disc four is made up of a reworking of *Mercure's* legendary first hit, "No Hunter", originally released by Fiat Car, then titled "No Hunter", is re-named with a kind of high-end static that send it into grotesque, disordered spaces. (K+) Reviewed by Bryan Coley and David Rensan

The Compiler

Various artists: reviewed, rated, reviled

Many encephaly returns: The Birthday Party

Australian concert promoter Tim Patman's **Tales From The Australian Underground: Singles 1976-1989** (Feel Presents Pty Ltd 336142 2XCD) is a personal labour of love that has taken five years to put together. Compiled from his collection of homegrown 45s, independently released during the late '70s and '80s, Patman presents an introduction to the neglected Australian punk rock scene, gathering together names both familiar and virtually unknown. One of the lackluster of the Shogies-inflected clank and clout of Radio Birdman, who set the stage for what follows: a passionately pounding set of all rock new-wavesters that range from the snarled abrasions of The Saints and The Scientists, through the new wave posturings of sub-Buzzcocks group The Ripptides and Blondie to upstart Sydney Kifans, to the early Go-Gos goings of The Birthday Party, whose "Happy Birthday" still sticks out like a freshly torn thumb. Disc two features the more experimental rumble of groups such as the Wiffies, Lighthouse Keepers and Dead Prety, where an element of psychedelia is allowed to softly blur the edges of the full-on rock rage elsewhere. Equally interesting is Thug's rockabilly rant "Dad", which is jelled out over a piddling bassbeat and doused with feedback axing and electric guitar fumbling. The result is something that could have originated in Pete Dink's industrialised stomping ground Cleveland rather than some isolated provincial town in Oz. Thug's vocalist Les Perkins went on to form The Brats of Bourbon, a bluesy drag group of some significance unfortunately not represented here. What Patman has gathered together, however, is a fascinating audio archive of raw Australian rock that flashes back, Nuggets-style, for those who missed hearing these groups the first time round. (EP)

As pointed out by audio curator Pat Conits in the sleeve notes to his exemplary Secret Museum Of Weekend compilations, nearly as much of the dawn of pop mythology in the early 20th century, the business of juddering recorded music to the owners of recently invented turntables had yet to harden into a rapid turnover of pop hits. Recording operations were dispatched by record companies of the day, both to claim foreign territories as clientele and to collect sounds from exotic locales. Further complicating the nascent "World Music" enterprise were competing technologies offered by wild firms: As one company's discs were often incompatible with another's playback mechanism, record companies back in the day had all the more reason to assert their presence within a given marketplace. The Gramophone Company of London achieved regional hegemony in the Caucasus and Central Asia, the

and field of several recording series throughout the Russian Empire. One particular visit by German recording engineer Franz Rampe in 1909 proved the most fruitful. The best performances transcribed by Rampe for the Gramophone Company's flat disc system have finally been reissued on the latest release from the British Library National Sound Archive. **Before The Revolution: A 1909 Recording Expedition In The Caucasus And Central Asia By The Gramophone Recording Company** (Topic TS921 CD) documents folk idioms from ten regions. Small instrumental ensembles featuring duduk flutes (their timber made familiar through the contemporary popularity of Djivan Gasparyan) and the doll hand-drum set comfortably note to choir and silk-stringed clatter waltzes. Compiled and commercially released by Will Prentice, *Before The Revolution* gives with the friendly sheen of a Grand Ole Opry show staged in the Balkans.

Though the disc abounds with examples of meagres, the quantum units of Persian music, freely threaded through art and folk forms, it's the choral voices preserved by Rampe that command most attention. Nine choirs were recorded during his 1909 foray, all singing in local dialects. The Qushtan choir (recorded in Vladikavkaz, the mid-point between the Caspian and Black Seas) hit and held pitches with scientific precision. The performance of "Kuday Zayand Lach Zayand" still starts a hygienic jolt on the unsuspecting listener, a masterpiece of unswerving architecture to rival the harmonic specificity and innovation of either The Early Brothers or La Monte Young's *Theater Of Eternal Music*. Only a few moments' exposure to these unearthly drones explain the willingness of early recordings to risk attack by mountain bandits en route to adorning comparable ensembles.

As bells clank made in the sleeve notes for the British Library's collection as "a living archive", the same recording allows music to transcend any drag on one's soul. One heard here. The shimmering coarseness of the chug, a hammered dulcimer from the Emirate of Buhara, near the spectral gorge. So do the voices of soloists such as Khopet's soulful rhapsodic troubadour, Taj-Khan Khajimretov. *Before The Revolution* allows a glimpse of vital cultures immediately prior to their extinction during the Soviet era. We beyond such academic considerations, however, this is music vibrant with invention and awe, drenched in tears and salt lustrous nearly a century down the line. (RH)

Celebrating the tenth anniversary of John Zorn's *Musica John Zorn Volens In The Wilderness* (Tosak T271 72 2XCD) is a collection of interpretations, by the cream of the New York downtown scene, of Zorn's *Nasada* songbook,

which was originally envisaged as a mix of traditional Jewish melodies delivered in the style of Ornette Coleman's groundbreaking quartet. The strength of Zorn's compositions is evident throughout this album, as they survive an overwhelming variety of interpretations played on an equally vast range of instrumentation, conducted by a massive cast, who are all imaginative musicians and composers in their own right.

Having arranged *Musica* pieces for both string trio and larger ensembles, Zorn must have been surprised and delighted by the sheer musical audacity on display. Tim Hatfield's take of "Lament" is as beautiful as it is highly inventive, while Medeski, Martin & Wood's version of "Ziphim" has the consistency of paint stripper. Danny Zane's incendiary saxophone workout with Sarban on "Newark" is a gleed next to Jewels Eisenberg's haunting vocal reading of "Hobbes", while Rashawn Gandy, Jon Medoff's interpretation of "Wednes" is contrasted with the violin, cello, bassoon and cello drum atrocity of Dawkins's version of "Rokhiv". Caplan has been levelled at the sheer size of the *Musica* canon (even DWI quartet albums and four live *Tadzik* outings, plus *Musica* guitars and the various string combination CDs to date), and over-exposure can leave the listener with mind-numbing indifference to compositional nuances, but *Musica* in the Wilderness goes a long way to redressing the balance. (JY)

Her Apollonia in *Ensemble* was a vital centre for performance and exhibitions between 1960 and 1997. Paul Panhuyser, who ran the project with his wife Hilde, has compiled *Apollonia And Marjorie: An Anthology Of New Music Concerts* (APOLLONIA 090217/090218 2XCD) as a fabulous mosaic of the voice and its values. 38 excerpts, ranging from two and a half to six and a half minutes, have been chosen from around 500 music and sound art occasions. Preservation of chronological order highlights the program's extraordinary diversity and makes clear Panhuyser's disinterest as facilitator. He established Her Apollonia as a vital node within an international network of investigative music making and actively encouraged exploratory acts within its spaces. First fully registered in these recordings, The Trio disc opens with Derek Bailey duetting with cellist Ernst Reijiger; the second ends with the digital tattooing of Matt Rogalsky's electronic composition "Ludic Locus". Sounds in between range from natural electromagnetic discharges captured by Alvin Lucier to a stirring version of Ryo's Chieftain's "Kilobits No. 2" performed by Peter Kaki's SEM Ensemble, from Pauline Oliveros's accordion meditations to the raw pulse of Satoru Tanaka, from the homemade percussive of Pierre Berthet and

Bridget Romano to the digital electronics of Carl Stein, Arnold Dryblatt leads his Orchestra Of Exalted Strings, Alvin Curran interacts with street recordings, Joe Jones activates his musical automata, Jerry Hurt assumes the guise of electronic shaman and Elaine Rudnik drones mysteriously. Voices heard include Carles Santos, Phil Winter, Iveta Brezova and Shelly March. Solo instrumentalists include reedman Ned Rotherberg, guitarists Ben O'Rourke, Elliott Sharp and Rafael Rusk, percussionist fast forward, violinist Katie Matthews and multi-instrumentalist Takekazu Kasugai. There's much more besides, although nothing as regretfully from Panhuyser himself. Packaged with his customary care, it's a limited edition and its terrific. (JC)

Soon after Peter Kowalewicz set in New York, and less so before his death, the great German bassist became involved with the city's annual Vision Festival. It is thus fitting that **VISION Live From The Vision Festival** (Thirty Art THS7133 CD), drawn from the 2002 programming, coincides with a Kowalewicz He was, after all, a visionary musician who saw beyond commerce practices and pursued his own way of making music without compromise. That's keeping with the Festival's principles. The preceding music as often patient, starting with Munir playing Albert Ayler. The final quartet of equals brings together at least James Moody, trumpeter Roy Campbell, bassist William Parker and drummer Rosalind Baker. (David Bussell is in punch, then thunderous mood, with fluent commentary from Jesse Bond's bass, Basia, Reggie Workman is prominent in The Karen Borca Quartet, a pivot for Borca's bassoon dialogue with Rob Brown's alto while drummer Newman Taylor-Becker keeps busy. The Billy Bang Trio's contribution finds the violinist's questing blowdown poised on a threshold between Hermet Drout's punch, jazzy baritone and Jin Hi Kim's spars, spangly korngang. Douglas Ewart ticks horns with fellow reedman Joseph Jarman and efficient trombonist Thomas Lee Smith, that treaciness matched in strength by Parker's bass coupled with Hermet Drake's drone, while Miya Masaoka searches for spaces to sublate her koto. Parker faces a more oblique challenge in pianist Matthew Ship's String Trio, negotiating between Ship's stacked wedge and viola player Matt Maren's jagged edginess. Parker and Drake sublate into gentleness to lend support for Ellen Chioff's wordless vocalizing and Rolf Sturm's moodily reverberant electric guitar, and they get Burke on demand alongside veteran tenors Rudi Jordan and Fred Anderson. A collection of highlights documenting the cohesiveness and beauty that are vital to Vision. (JC)

Reviewed by Adam Cowley, John Craddock, Richard Henderson and Edwina Poustey



researcher and discographer Anthony Bennett adds jazz and improvised violin, and he will follow the recorded traces of jazz violinist Stuff Smith to the ends of the earth. Born Heczekiel Smith in Portsmouth, Ohio in 1900, Stuff Smith started out with Jelly Roll Morton and made his name playing at the Oxy in New York in 1944, on the cusp between swing, novelty and bebop. Smith was unforgettable. After Joe Waller's death his took over his band, first from Kerschi in 1957. Dixie Gillespie introduced Smith to some of the scales he'd learned in the East, and the pair recorded "Joe Pelestein" together in other words. Smith was a real musician, unconstrained by notions of genre.

The two discs here are named *Desert Sands* and *Up Jumped the Devil*. Sound quality is rigorously faithful to the sources, which range from lacquer transfers to 18rpm pressings and magnetic tape. Not designed for the casual listener, Bennett creates a special world where you must adopt his own prescription for the murmur of Stuff Smith's legacy. Often released from past eras emulate the style of the period, evoking the clichés used by terribe exhibitions or theme restaurants. Here, recordings and photographs are presented like treasures in a collector's cabinet, in elegant starkness. You must study each track, appreciate every mark.

Stuff Smith's world playing is fast, witty, extraordinarily flexible. There are two duets here with the classical pianist Robert Grant, who sound like him by playing boogie-woogie. Perhaps Bennett's claim that their experimental encounters (rehearsal?) wrapped free improvisation is a little far-fetched, but there is much that will fascinate musicologists here. Smith plays most impressively with snappy jazz rhythm sections, where his astounding harmonic intelligence is squeezed and pressured, and he cannot get by with Pain Court thumpity or sentimentality.

Bennett wisely finishes the collection with "Up Jumped the Devil", a recording which was announced in Down Beat on 15 August 1945, but never surfaced on vinyl (it may have been broadcast in the radio or performed on sheet music). The song is humorous, and concerns the indecipherable presence of bodily drives and their interference with conscious wishes. It's a wonderful deflation of the net agreement of blues and jazz – not to say the rock and Roll they give birth to – and deserves to be broadcast everywhere.

DU SPOOKY THAT SUBCUNIAL KID SUBCUNY

THIRTY EAP THIRTY 1982 CD

BY STEVE BARKER

The original albums, of which this is the dub, appeared last year in respectful tandem to the Thirty Ear's Blue Series, committed to a re-exploration of jazz now. Maybe that was the intention, but the best playing on that album, which matched DJ Spooky with jazz players, still sounded a lot like guys 'doing it'. And that's why the tunes mostly came off so lush despite carrying the load of Spooky's rather laboured nudism in their titles and the albums' suggestive notes. Perhaps the notes could be re-visited too.

This is not a dub companion as such. On *Cubomancy*, friends and collaborators were

invited to create new versions from the tracks of their choice. The presence of Lee Perry and his longest lasting collaborator, the Mad Professor, is of little consequence here, although their names are justly emblazoned on the cover art. Perry, on saxal form, manages to rhyme "junkie" with "murkine" before trailing off into the fade. The eminent Pops contribution is unclear apart from the interlude that bears his name.

The traffic noise that opens up DJ Gee's mix sets the claustrophobic levels that pervade the rest of the album. "Cubomancy" lacks the swing and space of the original in a tradeoff for more, unnecessary, ideas. It appears the accepted strategy for the dub mix has been revised, rather than stripping channels out, new layers have been added. Taken individually some of the tracks here may stand up, but J-Lee's take on "Optimetry" fails to bring up Daniel Bernard Romane's solo violin in the mix. Its resemblance to John Coltrane's on the Velvet Underground's "Black Angel's Death Song" is striking, and J-Lee could have also made more of the post synth bass off that opened the original. Samples from Mike Dineen's over-plundered "African Anthem" recur through the mixes. Refreshingly, "Panchurates" dubs out Napoleon's rap, but on the downside Joe McPhee's great free sax break is dropped too low. The Weight Circus mix on "Narbon Cybernetic" finds Ryan Moore lauding in his twin experimental and dub roots. The set's most (my) pick, it features a gently meandering rhythm over which McPhee gets comically on trumpet. Geneva's DJ Gee's promise "Optimetry" into his own "Bambi Mac" and gets more into breakfast cut 'n' paste territory, but ultimately it's just another remix. Other cuts come from Spooky's collaborative I-Sound, Colorado, Negativland (a mess) and Animal Crookers.

NATSUKI TAMURA QUARTET HADA HADA

UNION 1997 CD

BY PHIL FROGMAN

This collaboration between trumpeter Natsuki Tamura and his wife, keyboardist Satoko Fuji, is a rolling storm of sound, often beautiful but never placid. Tamura's trumpet is fed through pedals, but it's hardly mauling. Miles Davis's wah-wah wails of the early 1970s. He opens the title track blaring like a Oval Diesel alarm and rarely lets up. Behind him, Fuji (switching from her usual piano to synthesizer) and guitarist Takayuki Kato erect a fortress of thick chords, filling every crevice of the mix with resonating tones until the duo are functioning like one giant, vibrating horn. The only player whose contribution is constantly apparent is drummer Takashi Masuoka. His too, employs electronics as wasp, his drums crash like trash cans hurled from five stories up.

It's inaccurate to suggest that the record is all of a piece, though. The swooning of the title track is countered by the second off's feghem and half-audible human voices muttering in the background. Artly called "The Incident", it sounds like a snippet from the score to a horror film, with Fuji's dissonant keyboard foisting the rhythm pattern like she's trying to fit every third beat from the drum solo on Iron Butterfly's "In-Goddad Go-Vida". Barring, for his part, favours electrified blues over spooky dreams of notes. On "Uriage", meanwhile, Kato's guitar dust with

Fuji's funeral pipe organ sounds like a death bell between Lou Reed and Tom Waits.

This music doesn't sing, it stomps. Hada Hada dwells quite comfortably in the realm of pure sonic devastation, like smooth jazz remixed by Meenbow. Electronic or otherwise, no other jazz record has been so set on repeatedly and wildly disturbing the listener.

TIBETAN RED/VICTOR NUBLA TAO POINT

HRONBY MCD SERIES VOL 1 CD

VICTOR NUBLA

ANTICHON

HRONBY/GALTIOTOKA MAGJALAE GAN-LOOG CD

BY ANDY HAMILTON

Something of a cult sound artist in his native Spain, Victor Nubla is a paradoxical talent on the evidence of these two discs. *Tao Point* was recorded at Miss Prosser, Spain, and its pattern is soon clear. Essentially *Tao* is an exploration of instant, slowly changing low and drones, all the closing murmur or set of each track, when heightened by more dynamic activity intrudes. On "Respect Point", the sound descends low enough to be quite disturbing. "Womb Point" is the aural equivalent of an immersion in amniotic fluid, with gently oscillating drones for most of its 16 minutes, before industrial sounds are briefly introduced. The result is an eerie, disturbing piece of industrial/ambient soundscapes.

Antichon is more ambitious, but sadly reveals that Nubla is not so adept in his handling of structural resources. Recorded live in Barcelona, it features Nubla on samplers and modified alarms, Rapoon's Robin Strevy on sampler and "anal instruments", and other musicians contributing percussion, timbales and effects. The instrumental writing and/or playing is clichéd, and electronic effects are just that – bubbling synths, thunderstorms, dripping water, very applied. This is kitsch and should be avoided.

TERRE THAEMULTZ LOVEBOMB

MILLE PLATEAUX MP 17 CD

BY ANNE HILDE NEZET

By the electronic acoustic composer Terre Thaumultz's latest venture is an attack on that all-embracing human emotion called love. The record is a complex and beautiful composition collaging arctic manifestos, dialogues descending into screams, political bomb, subtle electronic textures, melancholy whirring piano, multifarious drums, sampled soul cries, true blue Country, bean brass bands, folk cays, 80s disco samples, Morse code beeps, snatches of conversation, squeaking toys and machine gun outries.

There's quite some sonic vocabulary Thaumultz has put together for an album whose 14 tracks are essentially interrogating – albeit each in a different way – the slogan "all we need is love". Love, he says, has its dark and destructive side: love for the forehead-brooding faison, possessive love preloping domestic violence, religious love outwitting factionalism and terrorism. It is an ongoing race as unbroken. Considerable for love, meanwhile, music blindly ponders lovelessness. Thaumultz's own artwork for *Lovebomb* sums a line-drawing connecting the ruins of 9/11 and the earth gas attack on the Tokyo underground beneath a pinky pastel



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Avant Rock

Reviewed by Edwin Pouncey

FORT DAX

FOLLY
TUSCANY TUGBOGS CD

Fort Dax leads, music like melodic, the occasional head-bob-like vocal and plenty of bedroom studio synthesizer stroboscoping are the basic ingredients that have gone into making this intriguing piece of work housed in a cover that is designed to look like one of American artist Joseph Cornell's boxes of surreal ephemera. Fort Dax's Foxy is an oddity that falls somewhere between 70s Krautrock and a John Carpenter soundtrack, with maybe just a hint of Philip Jack tamable manipulation thrown in for good measure. This strange and slightly disturbing set of gloriously instrumental tubulars, harpsichord harmonies and samples of electronic ecstasies are intriguing to say the least.

GODFLESH

MESSIAH
RELEASED 09/08/04 CD

Godflesh's awesomeness, borne splintering guitar, bass and machine noise was turned up a notch on their long sought after Messiah EP to reach new heights of metallic mental hallucination. Recorded in 1994 and made available only through the group's official Website, Messiah quickly described into legend. Lead and guitarist Justin Broadrick disbanded Godflesh in 2002 to pursue his own solo career. All of the original four tracks that made up that original artifact are present, together with freshly handed remixes which give a new dimension and direction to the group's fearsome and penetrating Techno rock vision of a world gone horribly wrong.

CHARLES HAYWARD

ABERRACADA PRA INFORMATION
RELEASED 09/08/04 CD

Former This Heat drummer Charles Hayward's first solo recording for eight years is a set of four songs and two instrumentals on which he also plays tapes, percussion, melodica and keyboards. His arrangements for these are perfectly acceptable when he surrounds his solidly paced drumming with a variety of alternative rhythms and effects, but as soon as Hayward begins to sing a beeping of inner dread takes over it sounds here as though Hayward has a problem singing and drumming at the same time. Lyrically the songs are somewhat sparse inducing, and as his voice is a grating raw throatled screech, you might wonder why he bothers to sing. However the instruments make a much more seductive set of rhythms, drawing dark paintings that throbb with rhythmic colour.

JE SUIS FRANCE

FANTASTIC AREA
ORANGE PUNK NO NUMBER CD

Je Suis France (aka The France) are a five piece from Athens, Georgia whose lot of influences include Gang Of Four, Superchunk, Neil, Sadeism 3 and Outkast. What they really sound like though – particularly on the opening title track and the closing "Hate Violence" – is Bad Moon Rising-meets Snake Youth. This is no bad thing, especially in view of the course of Fantastic Area

they find their own sound, when they lash out a slew of high energy rockers. These range from the full-on attack of "Memorial Day" to the more subdued, thoughtful and experimentally arranged "Live To Die" and "Space Rules", where the France reveal that they have plenty of ideas and the power to convincingly push them along.

KINN

KINN
RITZ-AT-ETRE TATTOO CD

German guitarist Frank Schilling Blum and bassist Marcel Tschewsky's Kinn project follows the style of such artists as John Fahey, Geste Del Sol, Lemme Tisdale and This Heat, with a hint of Steve Cauley and Erik Satie's boomerang minimalism thrown in for good measure. Kinn is a delight that recent converts of Stefan Bacho-Jungheims and the rest of the recent experimental guitar solo scene will find irresistible. Bored by Tschewsky's simple and expressive bass work, discreetly tempered with electric effects, Blum's technique of allowing space to become an integral part of his playing style gives the music room to breathe and seep into the atmosphere. Rather than ending up as just another Ambient exercise, however, Kinn's rich palette of different tones and worldly music influences ensure listeners stay on their toes.

THE LIFE PARTNERS

PARTNERS FOREVER
TWISTED VILLAGE TWO/03 CD

What higher recommendation could any young aspiring group hope for than to get a big thumbs up on their press release from legendary 1960s rock entrepreneurs? Kim Fowley, who certainly knows a good thing when he hears it. The Life Partners may not be in the same league as The Runaways or Helen Reddy (two of Fowley's former girls), but their righteous looking together of James Chance and The Electric 66s with something that sounds like its tail is on fire bears all the markings of future greatness.

MALADE DE SOUCI

MMMM BBA
NO STOPS NO10 CD

Malade De Souci are a Prog punk trio from St Louis, but they could just as easily hail from Osaka, as their high speed, funk rock punk rock robot resembles early Boredoms on hysterical overdrive. Never thought I could say this about a CD that contains 92 songs, but this is short, sweet, snappy and a lot of fun.

MOGWAI

HAPPY SONGS FOR HAPPY PEOPLE
PUNK PAKKISS CD

Glaswegian instrumental rock group Mogwai are adept at putting up pleasant enough musical wallpaper that goes straight up and down without causing offense. Stand back and the flowery potteries they carefully place together from song to song merge into a whole when you ask no longer see the joins between the separate tracks. Occasionally a part might peel off to temporarily spoil the effects, and these

turn out to be the best bits. Unfortunately they happen all too rarely.

MY CAT IS AN ALIEN

OUT OF THE BLUE – INTO THE WHITE
GMAX CD 03/03/04

THE COSMOLOGICAL EYE
TRILOGY PART ONE: INTO THE SLEEPING BEAUTY GALAXY
GMAX CD 04

Italian DJF space noisers My Cat Is An Alien's rampant release schedule continues with a triple CD-R set and the first part of a new recording project that, by its title, is attempting to attract Sun Ra worshippers to their cause. Out Of The Blue – Into The White is an enormous sprawl of space guitar wailing, Very Connected connected violin scrape and falling drum and symbol work. Most of it is a shambolic and shapeliness, but not without a certain naive charm. "PLAY IT LOUD!" they demand on the slip of paper that passes for a cover, but even at low volume MCAH manage to get their message through. More structured is the first part of their Cosmological Eye Trilogy where deep cosmic dreams radiate out and simplistic guitar chord structures are randomly dropped in to create a sense of surreal hypnosis. Complete with hand printed handbored on cover and Xeroxed insert, the production takes on the mantle of a release from Saturn.

THE NEW PORNOGRAPHERS

ELECTRIC VERSION
MADCAT CLEVER CD

Vancouver's New Pornographers are a power pop sextet led by singer, songwriter and guitarist Carl Newman, with additional writing and vocal assistance from 'secret member' Dan Boor. Their songs are predictably pinned with enough catchy licks to pull you into a web of upbeat optimism – complete with quaffy lyrics inspired around 'look-out' chorusing – but there is nothing to really grab hold of in order to avoid yawning from falling into a comatose state while waiting for these pop pomoters to do the dirty – or at least something nothing enough to make a mess.

SUNDIAL

ZEN FOR SALE
ACME NO NUMBER CD

Occasional Current 93 guitarist Gary Ramon resurfaces with his own high flying pop, Sundial, to drive a new collection of eschewed/psychic pop and rock anthems like an organic food ad package from the gods. Zen For Sale runs the gamut of 1960s and 70s psychedelic rock styles, from the Barrett-era Eyespace space rock drive of "Open Your Eyes" to the bad and electronic art rock splutter of "Bad Rest", all of them spilt out with a style and a knowledge that clearly reveal Ramon as a master of his craft.

VAN OEHLEN

ROCK & ROLL IS HERE TO DIE
BLACK CHOPS/STARS CD10 CD

German artist brothers Albert and Markus Oehlen return with a second batch of beguiling bass beats,

deep froed samples and a guest appearance from Mayo Thompson of Red Krayola, singing on three of their deliciously deranged compositions. Thompson and Van Oehlen's collaboration is an oddity singalong, with "Tennis" sounding like the early Alan Vega taking a late night jog through Odessey Cleaverwater Revival's "Run Through The Jungle", while "Chili" is a despatch diary that could have been scraped from the hall of Red Krayola's second album for International Artists. "R&R" comes out fighting with an elbow keyboard solo, a negligently familiar orchestral sample, dumb drums and Thompson's muffled declaration that "Rock and roll is here to die". After Van Oehlen's wailing, rock 'n' roll has never sounded in better shape.

THE WARLOCKS

PHOENIX ALBUM
BRIKMAN BWH/01 CD

Craising through the desert with a trunkload of guitars and handkerchiefs, Fear And Loathing In Las Vegas-style, that's the magic conjured up by "Shake The Dope Out", the opening track on The Warlocks' Phoenix Album. Hailing from California, The Warlocks have been compared with groups such as The Velvet Underground and Brian Jonestown Massacre, in which lead vocalist Bobby Hecker had a brief stint. The inevitable Spacejam 3 influences are confirmed by Sonic Boom's heavily distorted-laden guitar contributions on the album. "Cosmic Letdown" introduces waves of pure static electricity that slowly weave their way through hypnotically repetitive guitar riffs. The tide comes crashing in with the onset of heavy droning basslines in preparation for the storm, but the blanket of chaotic gloom and doom eventually begins to disperse, making way for the rejuvenation of a calm sea. The pure psychedelic wave is abated by the inclusion of "The Blue Fairy Dance", which leaves the mood with wholesome pop melodies and a feeling of admissible carelessness. But it's on tracks like the ethereal, 15 minute "Oh Shikadee" where the group's acid washed sound really takes off. (Heck Chopper)

YEAH YEAH YEAHS

FEVER TO TELL
DRESS UP/RECORD 09/01 CD/1

In the wake of The Strokes and White Stripes come New York's lo-fi Yeah Yeah Yeahs, who similarly present their own take on 70s new wave and garage rock. Led by Chinasee head soundbabe Karen O, with impressive guitar gymnastics by Nicolas Zinner and forceful drumming from Brian Chase, Yeah Yeah Yeahs' debut album looks out low and hard with a set of ingeniously performed rock riffs distinguished by Karen O's smart and smattering lyrics. Smaugie morphs into like "Black", "Date With The Night" and "Worm" are pushed to this fire, but add a little deeper and lo-fi Yeah Yeahs' darker side goes. Particularly on the electroacoustic bad trip of "No No No" that drives the rest of the album into a more exciting and inventive direction. Go Home, "I Control" and the absorbing "Modern Romance" the top's true potential shows through the already seeking plastic of their earlier songs. □

Critical Beats

Reviewed by Philip Sherburne

ALEX CORTEX

INWARD CTRL
AHS-AMC-ANNU CD/CDR

Despite having recorded for Klang Karrierent and Scream, Germany's Alex Cortex remains relatively unknown. But his first album for the new Amsterdam label Ann Amc is a low-profile affair: Across 24 tracks, Cortex lays down powder-junk funk composed of distorted Detroit techno and the pulverized remains of early IDM. Guitlessly saccharine string pads, agile synopses, bright harpichord tones and languid, post-funk basslines are his stock in trade. Recalling the sleek-but-punchy approach of certain Black Dog productions, many of his tracks clock in at under three minutes. Indeed, a quarter of them are less than two minutes. But they're far from slapdash or mere interludes. Though pieces emerge from them, crystalline forms in the course of a handful of bars, and once they achieve perfection, they're content to slide into a velvet sliver, yielding the floor to the next unlikely gem.

JIRKU/JUDGE PLUSTRIM

CHERRY ONTARIO CD

A lovely CD of skipping percussion and unassuming restraint, *Plustrim* is all about the subtle recognition and the hush of words held back. Traces and vapour trails and wedding stalks of gear, like bodies meeting delicately "through the rears." Toronto's Robin Judge and Jonas Jirku, known from releases on Kn Type and Force Inc, mold purr-like chords into soft, rounded shapes that initially sound delicate, but turn out to be strongly durable. They press real-world elements — off-colour twangs from the dead part of the guitar's neck, brittle piano tinklings — into the geyseric lumps, resulting in an adorably mischievous sound. Occasionally a sense of mischief sets in, not the rehearsal of form, but simple, physical logic, manifested in sluggish beats and chords that move forward like leaden feet at high altitudes. It's an interesting approach for Microhouse, which is so often about the unencumbered glide. Judge and Jirku take inspiration from the nodular slowness that wraps itself around the quickest of pulses.

GUSTAVO LAMAS RADIANTE EP

RECORD CAMP CD

The livid anti-art in Argentina these days, but you wouldn't know it from listening to the latest release from Buenos Aires's Gustavo Lamas. Previous records for Filig, Baum and Onal have been mad affairs of shifting chords and pulses so fast they're barely implied, but these four tracks pursue their autumnal shudders with puny impulsive rhythms and cooing accents. Radiance is not only Lamas's most assured work but also his most optimistic. "Meiridun" especially seems to be a dreamy, hazy blur as smooth it roars. Lamas took heavy-handed, but he's already enough with a dose of rotation of chords and idiosyncratic rhythms, but halfway through a quietly ecstatic river burrows up from the midst of the middle, like raw desire

displacing every other emotion like so much lukewarm bathwater.

G LISTER

G LISTER RIDES AGAIN

SPYMANIA VS MOSQUITO RECORDS SPYR2 12"

Last time I checked in with Spymania it was a dull 'n' bass label. Clearly I haven't been playing close enough attention, because on this joint effort with Cristian Vogel's Mosquito imprint, G Lister (who may or may not be Jamie Lidell) uses up four tracks of highly ecstatic beat factory that refuses to be sketched comfortably with breakbeat or techno. The opening "Glist It Go" effects clanky, rock tumbler percussion with a chorus of howling tree kaddies and clanking chains. Pounding rhythmically at 4/4 bpm, but with all the dancefloor features blotted into nothingness, this is haunted House at its spookiest. "Go Glist Go Glist", bedazzled by gongs and nubby with rubbery wavy percussion, is ecstatic ecstacy in the vein of Two Lane Speedways or Gascon. In keeping with its proto-inspired title, "Maffine Under Me Glist" is a seashell, one-eyed and thus deplorable panorama of lurching breaks and bignoms. "All That Glitters" hounds out the record with a hard hitting slide of hi-hat pecking Reg's blundering. G Lister with who knows, it's all scorching and shards of anise. We the pulverized 'fool of the sculptor's workshop.

UCIANO

ALPINE ROCKET

PERLON PERLON 12"

The Swiss-Chilean producer returns to Perlon — he contributed to the label's *Superlativity* compilation — after a spate of recent singles for Mental Grove, Bruchhaus and Klang Elektronik. In a genre where individual style is generally reduced to the most minimalist of touches to the template, Luciano's work is remarkably distinctive, borrowing from electro's clatter and Autechre's drooling, number 10 stomper. Most notably, though, Luciano overlays Microhouse's typical 4/4 pattern with a longer, two-bar figure that shifts the emphasis from the dub-influenced two and four to the third beat of every other measure — in effect, doubling his options and suggesting, in the manner of Jaki, simultaneous double-time and half-time versions. More importantly, perhaps, is the raucous melodicism of his compositions, which flexes out the comparatively prosaic world of his labelmates with the agonized tones of classic Detroit Techno and the brilliance of harpichord's flame. On "Alpine Rocket" (co-produced with Matthew Johnson), Casey Britton lends some, alerted scotch pitched somewhere between Nne Simone and Siobhan Sioux.

MIKE SHANNON KNOW RETURNS

CHERRY ONTARIO CD

AKUFEN

HORRORAMA EP

RECORD CAMP CD

Frictionless and seemingly without reference to any universe outside its own dozed system of

orbiting beats and magnet pulses. Mike Shannon's Techno locks its secrets inside a four by four box. "Wicked Pavillion", the Canadian producer's collaboration with acryumyrim Jim Straker-Ross, works in just the way, interestingly, satellite transmissions from an orb called Detroit and beaming back nothing but this cool, mathematical formulation. A trancelike kick drum judiciously keeps time while shuffling hi-hats threaten quiet revolt. Midway through, the track changes its tone entirely, as though the encryption lay were abruptly reset. "Ticket To Hades" and "Let's All Humane" offer slightly more ideologically, more personal Techno. Those two tracks are both obviously influenced by Morrok's Akuten, whose 1999 *Horrorama EP* affords a glimpse of the two-stepping technician before he got sucked into the video diet swirl of *My Way*. Around a steady 4/4 pulse, Akuten's off beats lurch drunkenly while bells, pings and chips scatter like emerald beads on a roulette wheel.

SKY TUCKER

PRESSING MATTERS EP

RECORD CAMP RELEASED 12"

VARIOUS

BROOKLYN KEOPS ON TAKIN' IT

RECORD CAMP RELEASED CD

For several years now, Brooklyn's Record Camp crew have been responsible for one of New York's more consistent showcases for IDM and ecstatic dance music. Its first release on their long promised label comes from Miami transplant Sky Tucker and, appropriate to his Florida origins, his four track *Pressing Matters EP* sashays with avant electro abandon. It's hardly shy about melody, but not in that two, its generation Funkadelic rip-off way, which makes for a change. Dense, unpop chords in major and (occasionally) minor, creating the flicker of so much base and such speed, needing twits, it should be noted that rarely, if ever, has an electronic label's very first release sounded this fat, this deep, this lit. Whoever mastered this sucker deserves a medal.

It might lift its title from Joni The Damage but Record Camp's inaugural compilation, *Brooklyn Keops On Takin' It* (complete with a very 'we wear our aesthetic on our sleeve' sleeve courtesy former DDB member Design By Build), suggests that there's more where Sky Tucker came from. Heat Sense, Datch's, Suijoni and Secret Agent Get weigh in with uncharacteristic, raw electro that suggests itself as the third point in the triangle between Skam and Schemata.

SUTEKH

HANDS ON FEET EP

MICRO SOLUTIONS TO MEGA PROBLEMS/

SOUL JAZZ RELEASED 12"

For the second release on Soul Jazz's electronic imprint, Microsolutions to Mega Problems, the label taps another San Francisco, Seth Herwitz to follow in Kit Culgan's shoes. Soul Jazz might be onto something. It certainly seems like 50% software-heavy experimental Techno massive is picking up steam after a year out of the

limelight. *Hands On Feet* is Sutekh's most deliciously stopgap work ever. It employs the same splattersome aesthetic as Soundcheck, Safety Scissors and, to a lesser extent, Akuten, featuring bits of grooves and toothed details into a dense patch of ground found sound. Vocalizations, horns, squeals, thudding kick drums and Metal power chords all steal themselves, Padkino style, into a buzzing, quaking machine. The oom-pah-pah of "Mouth Party" is so pronounced it could make the Kompakt folks feel out-Germanned, but "Bosler" does, which relies upon the same technique, is more streamlined, corralled elephantine bass and serpentine synth lines into an elegant pas de deux.

TWERK

CONTEXT FREE MEDIA TEXT11 12"

All proceeds from Twerk's second single for Sutekh's Context Free Media label go to benefit the International Campaign to Ban Landmines. Thankfully, however, the single is at least as sonically engaging as it is politically engaged. The four tracks here range from the San Francisco producer's trademark squishy and crackle Microhouse, to grinding, smoking ambience, to an almost straightforward R&B sensibility, a beat shipped in layer upon layer of combustible bubble gum. "No Test No Purpose" offers an example of the latter, riding on the kind of lazy House rhythm that's earned the name Detroit breakdown, touched up with dusty chords and amply fractured into a chattering mess of peaks and dips. "Motele" and the (temporarily titled) "Pens Slapping Against The Log Of A Naked Man Running" run closer to Twerk's previous releases for Force Inc, sequencing glancing chords and blasts of static into portraitist renderings as fluid as they are interpretive.

WHY SHEEP? EARTHBORN

THIRD CARD RELEASED 12"

What is it with the Japanese fixation on sheep? First there was Haruki Murakami's novel, *A Wild Sheep Chase*, now Gaku Uchida's *Why Sheep?* probes a weekly question across two strange tracks of ecstatic sampled in "Earthborn" sounds like an art but attempt at Big Beat, playing fierce funk guitars off carved from stars, guitar saxophones and martial drums and guitar. Tally kicking in well-restrained, the tune finds its opposite in "Clouds 757", which layers plucked and bowed strings, pianos and hushed percussion into a slow-motion wrestling match between Harold Budd and Steve Reich. The B-side's two remotes are for more straightforward. Redhouse manages to reconfigure Uchida's source material into a very Redhouse-like cut, complete with lullaby off-beat drum pattern, loud-beaming bass and gritty prog-rock guitars. Couched to Death's version of "Earthborn" memorably, fattens it all down into a slow, dry electro-Techno groove that harkens back to Third Ear's most notable release as far as Detroit breakdown Volume 1. □

Dub

Reviewed by Steve Barker

CLIVE FIELD MARSHALL POOR HOUSE ROCKERS

WARRIOR MUSIC
Released in 1981, the album quickly sold out and has since become a collectors' item, proving that, only once in a generation, of quality. Although it is true that many Wobblers productions have been unjustly underappreciated, this is not one of them. Covering a bewildering range of subjects including Jamaican tourism, Carter and Rogers, banks and buildings, it's all delivered in the mannered dancehall style initiated by Lone Ranger and not effectively emulated elsewhere by lesser DJs. The after taste is quite about three tracks in. A shame, as the fourth track "Shoop Sain Gown Close" is the album's highlight for the way it deals with the hip thing of the time — the bawler beat and sheepskin coat.

MAPSTATION/REASON RAS DONOVAN VERSION TRAIN STARGOOLD INC CD

Mapstation is the creation of To Rococo Rot bassist Stefan Schneider. Ras Donovan and DJ Scallo have both performed live with Rhythm and Soul's Tidelin, and it's to the Berlin singer that we must go for references. This is the latest example of an entirely new strain of reggae/dub-based electronics that is emerging out of the Berlin/Vienna axis — Radiotei's Martin Brandow also had a hand in producing. The vocal is now full of the drift of the monochrome, the vocal is now languorous, abstract and flowing style than, say, that of their UK Garage counterparts who imitate reggae's scattered style. It might not be built for dancehall movement, but it's still sensuous stuff.

JACKIE MITTOO CHAMPION IN THE ARENA:

**1987-1997
BLOOD AND FIRE BMR94 CD**
As Descent/Dodd's musical director at Brentford Road, Kingston in the 1960s and '70s, Jackie Mittoo's musical contribution is already assured. This set, produced by Bunny Lee and originally released as Showcases, dates from the time the keyboardist relocated to Toronto and made visits back to Jamaica for his sessions. These new interpretations of his earlier Studio One turntable like "Hot Milk", "Darker Shade Of Black" (itself a version of The Beatles' "Honeycomb Wood") and "Drum Song" are galvanised by the drums of the time, this time by Sly Dunbar, with the aid of Studio on percussion. While the 60s versions could have fitted into a coherent context, these new cuts were mostly dancehall. And funny too — just check out "The Sniper". Some of these original album tracks are given extended treatment and a further seven contemporary bonus cuts are added, most notably "Clean Up The Area", an organ version to Johnny Clarke's "Peace And Love In The Ghetto".

NINEY THE OBSERVER PRESENTS KING TUBBY IN DUB: RINGING THE DUB CUBE HEARTBEAT MUSIC 1997 CD

Eager not to miss out on the current wave of releases, Ninety is appearing in all formats and

from all directions. This one comes from his long-standing relationship with the Heartbeat label that has produced some nice compilations but, perhaps really inspired, saw a Dennis Brown dub album. The opening 12 tracks are Kubey at his most majestic, particularly "Dreadful Skank", where Tubby becomes a jazzmaster in his control of the ensemble. So much so, that it's difficult to believe that the final version cut was not arranged at the first recording session when the rhythm was laid. "King Tubby's Dub" is even more remarkable, as Tubby mutes all the channels save drums and bass for the middle section of the track's three minutes, generating a stunning set of dynamics solely through musical geometry. There's an additional bonus in the shape of a bunch of dubs from the Dubbing With The Observer album, even if they have appeared several times over the past few years.

LEE PERRY/THE WARRIORS & WONG CHU DISCO TROVIA/KEEP ON MOVING DISCOTHEQUE/TROJAN DRUMW 12"

I once bought a copy of the original 12" of this tune — a single version of Max Rooses' "Chase The Devil" — "Disco Dub" reproduces the original dubwise artwork of the 1977 release. But it's the flip that does the damage. The slugging rhythm pushing forward "The Warrors" vocal version of the Curtis Mayfield classic blues the mystique to come. "What is twisted cannot be straightened, what is not yet cannot be counted, confusion on the land." Says Tippitope DJ Wong Chu's famously apocalyptic MC intro, as he leads us into the sonic chaos of Perry's most extreme dub excursion. Echo and delay are set at maximum speaker-damaging levels, while the massively spaced trombone monotonically stinks through the dub. Do not miss this one.

SUPERSOUL 40 ACRES AND A MOOG METROPOLIS MEK007 CD

Jamaican born and Miami based Omar Gennetson, aka Supersoul, has been running backwards and forwards across multiple dance subgenres over the past ten years, appearing on countless Top-40 and Hip-hop compilations. His first solo album release, collects tunes from his previous 12" outings on his Metropolis label plus five new ones. The set morphs from the opening two deep reggae versions through a mix of twisted funk, agitated riddim lines, abstract bass lines and, finally, rap and dancehall featuring Judah Mann, Skam and DJ Infernus. Supersoul steers clear of the ordered chaos that occasionally reigns at the similar Woundland label with a lightness of touch that must be a Miami thing.

VARIOUS BAYBLON IS OURS: THE USA IN DUB SELECT GUTS 1996 CD

This collection of American dub was generously funded by Germany's Echo Beach/Select Guts outfit, but conceived on the West Coast by Ron Neelmeier from XL&R and DJ Sep from San

Francisco's Dub Mission. Pulling in offerings from both coasts and not much in between, the disc includes new tunes to this column, while producing the dub and avoiding the easy stereo shots, such as Ben We, whose pedigree indicates time spent in the orbit of Lowell and Tino Co. (including Jack Dangers) coming from a Hip-hop circuit. It's a worthy compilation, but it could easily have come from the UK and Europe ten years ago.

VARIOUS DANCEHALL 89: 40 SKINHEAD REGGAE RARITIES TROJAN 1999 CD

"Stop that messah band, I want to get off!" you may be singing to yourself as you read of Toyah's one millionth release comp. Well, if you haven't tuned out due to overkill, this is slightly better than your run of the mill ska collection due to its focus on the rarer end of the spectrum. The second disc, in particular, is a good antidote to the surfeit of "Dance Of Navarone" and "Return Of D'Angels" comps with The Prophets' gleeful and bloody "Revenge Of Eastwood", the joyful noise of Desmond Riley's "Fear Them", Sir Collin's sci-guns "Black Panther" and King Wroot's proto-Linton Kwesi Johnson "The Cutting Blade". (Peter Sheppard)

VARIOUS DANCEHALL TECHNIQUES MAXIMUM PRESSURE MPM CD1P

As author of its sleeve notes, I must declare an arguable interest in this anthology of largely vintage Winston Riley demotape productions. At the same time, I must also confess that repeated listening to Reggie Steppers' amazing mading of the "Stalag" rhythm, here known as "Go-unah", in no way diminished my admiration for this and many of the other great tunes collected here. Admittedly Toyah's "Lemon Popo Business", City Ranks's "Garrison Lines" and Johnny P's "Ial Jiggy" all remain crowning achievements of the DJ's art after all these years. Spanning the pre- and post-digital era, Winston Riley continued his prestigious career with the support and development of many of the greatest names to emerge in reggae through the 1980s, including Steely & Clevie who provided the rhythms for scores of the decade's greatest hits. This album sits alongside releases from sister label Pressure Sounds, Roots Techniques and Dub Techniques, in documenting Riley's remarkable career.

VARIOUS DON LETTS PRESENTS THE MIGHTY TROJAN SOUND TROJAN 1999 CD

It's difficult to see the motivation behind this album, except to say that if one in ten Clash fans buy it, then it will sell as a shorted for a reggae album. However, beyond this being a stroll down "Don Letts's personal memory lane", it's also a superior reggae compilation spread over two CDs. The first consists of unmissable "classics" with a second more interesting volume featuring tracks that have contributed to the growth of bass and dub culture. Unsurprisingly the second

selection could have been proudly stood alone with a much better mix of classics like "Liquidator", "Elizabethan Reggae", "Return Of D'Angels", et al, and pads from a deeper vein, like "Daddy No Go", "Soul Scanner", "Channel One Is A Joker" and "I Tine The Barber".

VARIOUS HIGH EXPLOSION: DJ SOUNDS FROM 1970 TO 1976 TROJAN 1997 CD

Sure, the majority of these tracks have been released a thousand times in every conceivable format, and yes, time and one-familialy have blunted much of their power, and 50 tracks of talkover and DJ chat from the same era is overkill, but this is still a worthwhile price of art of listening. Running from 1970, the opener being his truly epochal "Rule The Nation", to Jah Woot's, it's difficult to spot any glaring omissions from the yet to be constructed DJ Hall of Fame. Highlights include an early version of "Deck Off Cards" by the very great Prince Far I, King Heav's somewhat obscure but wonderful "Give Me Power (Version 2)", a glimpse into the early sound systems on a Sir Lancelotti "Jack Of My Trade", Jah Berry's magnificently iffy "Daughter Whole Little Sugar Down Deaf" and Dave Barker's truly beautiful version of Jerry Butler's "Only The Strong Survive".

VARIOUS RODIGNAN'S 25TH ANNIVERSARY EMM EMU101 2000 CD

Dave Rodigan first started broadcasting on Radio London in 1976 and has remained a constant presence on the UK's reggae scene ever since. As you can no doubt gather, this compilation includes tracks from across his entire career and beyond. The earliest tracks — Desmond Dekker's "007 (Shanty Town)" from 1973 and Mervyn Ayres' "You Are My Angel" from 1975 — indicate the scope of, and problems with, the album. The set focuses almost exclusively on the commercial, mainstream-friendly end of the reggae market, with obvious tunes (Max Priest, Gregory Isaacs, Shaggy, Shabba Ranks, etc) and sneaky Motown covers glared. At least it's got Rayven & Reid Foe's ridiculous "Bushman Perry". (Peter Sheppard)

SYLFOUR WALKER/ KING TUBBY DEUTERONOMY SCMTH EAST MUSIC 1996 CD

Genesis "The Godson" Brown has once again revised his South East music imprint, this time for a series of his roots classics repressed in the de reggae 10" format. Top spot goes to the extended version of Sylfofour Walker's "Deuteronomy", which appeared recently on the Glimmer Records label before quickly disappearing, its six minutes of hardcore righteousness is probably the most relentless Rasta mix cut to vinyl. The same series also includes another Wobblers, "Giant Down Babylon", followed by the dub "Respect Granted In Dubwise", and three additional cuts all wearing John Pake's riddim "Stalag" rhythm. □

Electronica

Reviewed by Ken Hollings

IA BERICOCEHA ROJO

MUS MINUS10 COLUP

"Rojo," the Spanish word for "red," as a word not likely chosen. Referring either to the memory of tango king Astor Piazzolla, whose memory was only kept during his belated absence by his orchestra leaving a sad candelon on his silent piano during performances, or to the colour of blood, the seven short tracks sequenced together here drop with a slow bloodletting menace.

Bericoche brings just enough emotional edge and sonic vibrancy to his dry minimalist beats and deep pulsing bass patterns to give them a steady, unsettling life of their own. His compositions seem to come out of nowhere, accumulating an undeniable presence that lingers on long after the final shadow.

CAPTAIN COMATOSE GOING OUT PLAYHOUSE OF GOD

There are some rules in life that are ignored at your peril. Never allow yourself to be photographed while eating, never shop anywhere that has the word "Simply" over its door, and never ever try to sing like Iggy Pop when covering one of his songs. It is a solid gold certainty you will end up sounding like Phil Oakey out of The Human League. Undisputed, when and DJ Snek, the duo responsible for Captain Comatose's mix of luring electro, wobble choruses and disco stomp, take a stab at belting out a karaoke version of "Baby" from Iggy's *Last for Life* album, and guess what? They sound just like Phil Oakey out of The Human League. Saw that one coming, didn't you?

CHRIS CLARK CERAMICS IS THE BOMB

WOLFPICT CD

It's tempting to find themselves apart from nanosecond to nanosecond, Chris Clark's complex digital structures are the flickering equivalent of those time-lapse photographs sequences showing a spider spinning its web, watched under the influence of powerful hallogenides. Beats twirl and stutter, recorded stretches of voices are fragmented and looped into meaningless babble. Dynamics are slipped to extremes. Then an occasional burst of AC 3000 soulness emerges to remind you of simpler, more reassuring times. As a precursor to the forthcoming album, *Empty The Boxes Of You*, the six files that make up *Ceramics Is The Bomb* seem more integrated and worked through than those on Clark's *Clarence Park* debut, allowing their messy heterogeneity to shine through. Skippy but safe.

CODEBASE STYLE INCODING

FORCE INC FM1054 CD

Seattle techno veteran Kim Butcher creates his science out of actual drum parts and pleasure. With releases on 240 Volts and Other Records already behind him, his Codebase offers an eminently lay-proof revision of just what electronic rhythms can do. As its title suggests, *Style*

Encoding is a historical projection, an elegant summation and an astutely focused projection into the dissonance of the immediate future. Clicks out the fish-faced electro beats of "Cascade View" and "Sire" longing to adjust the murky self-assured house of "Stormline 2", then last tossed to the expansive retrospective bleaching of the closing "Iron". Guaranteed to take you wherever you want to go.

DOPLEREFFK LINEAR ACCELERATOR

INTERNATIONAL DEW GIGGOLD GIGGOLDERS CD

Three years on from *Gesamtdunkelheit*, their previous long player for Gigolo, Detroit's Dopplereffekt are back with another extended penitential flight along electronic's shadowy outer edge. Themed around the swirling absences, subliminal vocalities and ecstatic sprits of particle physics, the six compositions on *Linear Accelerator* take up the space and time allocated to them with an easy authority. "Proton Impact" and "Neutron Resonance" are vast swirling expanses of sound. "Glowton" howls ferally while "Nylon Neutron" and "Z-Bomb" swell in the kind of empty periodicity normally associated with the hi-tech soundscapes John Carpenter used to record with Alan Howarth for films like *Escape From New York* and *Johnnie 5*. An uncompromising plunge into a darker dimension.

ELECTRONICAT 21ST CENTURY TOY

DISCO D D1015 CDUP

Persian Techno rocker Red Boyz knows the scene: stick a drum machine and a fuzzy guitar together and you've got half the pop culture of the past 40 years right in front you. No one yet knows what constitutes the other half, but it very probably involves doing a French language cover of "Intoxicated Love" that credulously brings its soul origins and goes straight for the Soft Cell version instead. All the same, "Amour Sale" works well alongside the dreamy slumber of "Whenever You Want" and the menacing, pumped up space rock to be found on the title cut. There's also a cute yardbirds parody running through "Bright", and some low rent allusions to early Adam and The Kinks kicking around "Frisco Bay". History you can dance to.

FRONT 242 PULSE

SONY BMG B2R5403342 CD

Belgian body language Front 242 have run their first five tracks into a long instrumental which glazes under the title "Seq666". Unfortunately the *Arctichrist* has had a pretty thingy time of it the past ten years or so and is currently reading in a retirement community in Florida where he's investigating local voting irregularities and definitely not taking cake. Meanwhile Front front and chug along in blissful ignorance, banging out bag electro beats as if there were no tomorrow. "There is nothing here I haven't been", runs the opening line, a song that could have been recorded any time over last two decades. "I'm just waiting for my turn to leave." You've got nobody to blame but yourself, pal.

KEN ISHII FUTURE IN LIGHT

EXCEPTIONAL CDPC0002 CD

As glitteringly transparent as the ether distillate were former graphics of his cover art, the latest release from the man who brought you the closing theme to the 1998 Nagano Winter Olympics and the soundtrack for the PS2 game, *Real 2*, sounds like it's actually emanating from the room next door. Expertly engineered and polished to the inside edge of invisibility, *Future In Light* marks a point where ambient becomes confused with remoteness. Even the Techno roughhousing of "Strobe Enhanced" and "Prestia" comes across as just a tad too distant and polite to be gripping. It looks towards music as an evocative presence, drifting from one world to the next, elegantly trying to sell you stuff.

ANGIE REED ANGIE REED PRESENTS THE BEST OF BARBARA BROCKHAUS

CHICKEN CO SPEED COBBIN CD

Cue the title theme to *The Mary Tyler Moore Show* as sassy ex-Stereo Total chanteuse Angie Reed throws her hat in the air and decides she's just made it after all. With a little help from the Chickadee Pop Speed house style, of course. Looks like all those years singing anti-pop covers of Serge Gainsbourg have finally paid off. Coming in like some divine motor-mouth hotchpotch, Reed goes her wicked way past disco gimps, psychic discs and disco whores, gives the finger to unreasonable bosses everywhere, utters some fly-girl's parts and has Andy Warhol going down on her Wonderbras (don't ask).

SCSI-9 DIGITAL RUSSIAN

FORCE INC FM1054 CD

With a string of 12 releases to their name, Moscow producers Andrei Kubluk and Maxim Milyutenko actually know how to go for the relentless beat and the extended effect. Balancing its shifts and phases, "Horizon 10" wastes no time pulling you in. "Deep & Fast" stretches House's latitude of movement and veers away into the 21st century, while "Space Days" reaches back to the shimmering party of early 90s Frankfurt techno, just so we don't forget where this is all coming from. Clean and serene, SCSI-9 give an object lesson in how to redefine Techno's abstract allure without either draining the life out of it or repeatedly oversteering the obvious.

ULTRA-RED AMNISTIA!

ANTHONG ANGIO CD

Adopt at the digital movement of massed bodies through space. LA activists Ultra-red transform the voices and sounds of a workers' rights rally in New York into a sequence of four rhetorical sound collages (taking place on May Day 2000, the public demonstration was in support of an amnesty for economic migrants to the US. The official 9/11 death toll lists only one undocumented worker as having died in the Twin

Towers disaster. However, at least a further 66 have been reported missing as a result of the WTC collapse. Any battle for free speech is also a battle for public space, by the widest definition of words. Ultra-red have given a voice to those who are forced to remain invisible.

VISIONS OF EXCESS SENSITIVE DISRUPTION

TONE CASUALTIES TSC004 CD

This is a US licensed version of an album that was originally released in 2001 on Italy's Minus Habens label. Here, Paul Brower, ex-Clock D4, System 01 and 000, joined forces with Forced Media Production's Wito Karsten Fischer to create some deeply disturbing, mood-altering ambient. Subliminal ruminations, clangs and rhapsodies gather together like a threatening storm, especially on the magnificent "Bell System" and "Translocation", giving way only to the laicist pursuit of noted philosophical triangler Robert Anton Wilson. Worth tracking down, as is last year's Minus Habens compilation *Fractured Reality*, featuring Waters of Excess, Metamorphs, Laurent Garner and Saurine Yokota.

GEOFF WHITE & STEWART WALKER DISCORD

FORCE INC FM1054 CD

Swapping tracks and files in an smoothly engineered flow, White and Walker take it in turns to bring the third mind back into creative existence. Popping from the springy electronic funk of Walker's "Mercedes Pt 1" to Geoff White's clipped beats, there beckon again for "Mercedes Pt 2". Discord is anything but discordant in its methods or results. On "Panda" and "Cloud City", White constructs puzzles for Walker to dissolve as some fine pieces of digital disco. Mixed in towards the set's end is "Carnalis Bloom", which keeps things crisp and clean right up to the flickering counterpoint of the final track "Sensilla". Represented only by blank silhouettes on the accompanying artwork, these are two minds with little to be so modest about.

ZEIGENBOCK KOPF NOCTURNAL SUBMISSIONS

NOCTURNAL CD

OK, here's one to separate the men from the boys. Without a hint of apology, German beatboxers Hens and Uli Bandschager (not their real names) drop dance music kicking and screaming into the bedroom and then get it open wide for daddy. And there's no arguing this time either. Dirty beats, dirty bass and utterly filthy production values come together in celebration of meaningless sex, needless drug consumption and the importance of brooding surrealities and excessive lip as befitting accessories. The heavy industrial thud on "Lustler Goggles", "Boom Car Boys 2" and "Hunter-Slayer" is guaranteed to get you on your knees facing you to your friends. So stop peeing and no peeing. This is definitely the most fun you can have with your eyes shut tight. □

Reviewed by Richard Henderson

Bob Brozman possesses the best passport that any peripatetic scholar of global music could

The Salento region in southernmost Italy offers yet more extraordinary evidence of how land continually fought over can absorb the culture of its conquerors and produce fascinating musical hybrids. Greeks, Romans and various Christian sects dissolved on its soil over the centuries. Its long history of conquests and invasions has produced a mosaic of traditions that is as diverse as the people across that land in 1954. Even if you ignore the wealth of regional obsequies performed on tape in 1954 by the late folklorist Allen Lomax, his documentation alone is fascinating enough, touching on the music and dance relating to the mysterious tarantismo phenomenon, wherein the sick are cured by the sound of violin and mandolin. In the 1950s, the folklorist and composer, anthems for exploited labourers, performed a cappella, often an ethnic-sounding ballad sung by an itinerant musician who accompanies himself with a light touch on acoustic guitar. Human voices animate this collection, revealing off-kilter tales, maintaining complex harmonies even as they hear role being broken in a quarry. Even the singers hold sustained notes with uncanny aim, and when all involved suddenly drop in pitch, they reveal the concurrent reverence of Sicily in Italy.

Reviewed by Dave Tompkins

THE WIRE 78

Jazz & Improv

Reviewed by Andy Hamilton

SEAN BERGIN MOB MOBILE

Enter saxophonist Bergin as from a later generation of the South African diaspora than Chris McGregor and Dodo Pukwana. He settled in Holland where he created his My Own Band aka MOB ensemble from members of Marnet Margulies's ICP Orchestra. Some of his MOBbers feature on the excellent album of Bergin compositions, recorded live at four dates at the Amsterdam Bimbas. Like some of Steve Bernstein's songs, the opening "Hi There" is too beautiful to be other than postmodern humor. Presumably it's Bergin ranting "Hi there" at the start and end, just as his big, pained tenor dominates. On the other track a cast of familiar suspects, including Curtis Clark on piano, Al Barron on clarinet, Walter Wladyslaw on trombone and Hen Bennek on drums, mix free and township influences.

JANE IRA BLOOM CHASING PAINT: JANE IRA BLOOM MEETS JAZZ POLLOCK

Bloom follows a free jazz tradition in dedicating an album to abstract expressionist Jackson Pollock. Although painter's modernism didn't extend to his musical tastes — he was a fan of Darius Milhaud and swing. However, his White Light tempestuously appeared as the score of Ornette Coleman's *Free Jazz* in 1960, prompting critics to draw parallels between their improvisational approaches. Like Steve Lacy, Bloom is one of the few saxophonists to play exclusively on soprano, though as before she debiles in electronics. Sadly her playing is rather characterless: her purrily, unlike Lacy's, bland rather than expressive. An unrelenting sound barely needs interest in her lines. But the album is worth knowing for the drum dreams of Fred Mesner on piano, Herk Mesner on bass and Bobby Previte on drums, as found on Bloom's *The Red Quartets*, who make anyone sound good.

ARTHUR BLYTHE FOCUS

The 62-year-old artist has expanded the trio heard on his glorious *Spontaneous In The Field* album from 1999, also on Savant, adding the concert grand maestro of David Wilkins' title to Bob Stewart's tuba and Cecil Brooks II's drums. It's an unlikely but very gorgeous quartet, with the mellow yet light and almost timeless grand maestro emphasizing the low end. Most pieces are by Blythe, the gentle, cosmic "Night Song" is most effective. Blythe's bluesy and often piercing wail is so immediately distinctive you forgive him resorting to his favorite lute, particularly the one that outlines the harmony. A beautiful return.

BILL FRIEDEL THE INTERCONTINENTALS

Bill Friedel's gentler take on American is a solid counter to John Fahey's stark primitivism, but this recording gives me doubts. In recent years he's

crossed the line between jazz and Country — or rather, introduced some jazz complexity into a Country style to beguiling effect. The problem here is not that The Intercontinentals is more Nashville than New York: it's the album's soft focus World Music fusion. Fossil plays with Brazilian guitarist Vinícius Cantuária, Macedonian oud player Christos Ganos, Matt's Sidiki Cansu on percussion and vocals, plus Jerry Schermer on violin and Greg Leisz on pedal steel and slide guitars. To say that it may not have been the producer's idea would unfairly finger Lee Townsend, who has served Friedel so well before.

SATOKO FUJII MINERVA

SATOKO FUJII ORCHESTRA
THE FUTURE OF THE PAST

The Japanese pianist and composer is an amazing profile, but then, to borrow David Manly's comment about why he keeps on showing, she's "a pretty big employer." The *Enja* release is a fine exhibition of her enduring concerns for the big band, and here she has attracted the most stellar company yet, driven by powerful drummer Aaron Alexander. The interest in her music comes less from melody than a master diversity of textures and tempos, with thunderous rock beats emerging from instrumental cacophony, and grooves broken up by free passages.

Minerva opens the quartet line-up of Volcan from 2001 and her CMJ tour last year, featuring her trumpeter husband Natsuko Tamura, Takanori Hayakawa's celloless bass guitar, and the towering presence of Ruus' Matsuo Yoshida on drums. While Volcan mostly consisted of shorter pieces, Minerva allows for more expansive treatment of free compositions. Post-Cat Taylor plays emphatically in juxtaposed with rock rhythms and hypnotic, minimal bass riffs on "Warp." "Welt" is jazzier but gentler and not so dark. Hayakawa's tubby bass solo maximally complex. An awesome recording.

JONAS HELLBOG ICON

Hellbog belongs to the astonishing abundance of Scandinavian bass players. He emerged in the 1980s, playing with the cooler indie incarnation of John McLaughlin's Meshugginah Orchestra and giving World Music credits with Teik Durbak. Icon crosses the Orchestra with McLaughlin's Shakti projects in an immensely enjoyable encounter between East and West. Hellbog plays solos with rock guitarist Steve Lane and three Indian musicians — percussionist V Selvaneeth and V Umashankar, and vocalist V Umamaheshwari. Stunning virtuosity is allied with musicality, in a more muscular and convincing fashion than Bill Friezel's *The Intercontinentals*.

FRED HESS RIGHT AT HOME

These saxophonist Fred Hess is an original. Despite his reference to the eleven notes to

current heroes such as Bob Berg, Michael Brecker and Joe Lovano, and their exploration of John Coltrane's legacy, his playing reminds me of anything of Wayne Shorter, at his elusive if not at his tame. A former of the Denver Colorado scene, Hess recorded the album there with pianist Mark Sabatella. His quirky compositions include "Going There," inspired by his New York visit in 2001 to record *Extended Family* with Paul Smoler (reviewed *The Wire* 2300). Grooves are mostly original, and Sabatella's playing is highly chromatic and his composing sympathetic. A thoughtful and rewarding release.

ANDY LASTER'S LESSNESS WINDOW SPLIT BRIGHT

ANDY LASTER
ERIK FRIEDLANDER
OUAKE

Andy Laster's unusual downtown line-up on his ambitious New World project features Erik Friedlander on cello, Bryan Carrillo on vibas and Michaela, Gung'ui on trumpet and Malcolm Sevin on drums. Laster, who here plays baritone sax, moved to New York in 1985 where he worked with Julius Hemphill and Herb Robertson. The *Lessness* ensemble was formed in 1997, and plays thoughtful, intelligent jazz with a central role for composition — "Mist" for instance, is mostly written out. Cellist Friedlander covers the bass role effectively Gung'ui's muted trumpet buzzes through "The Rosebush," while "Hologram Days" is a slightly queasy combination of waltz time and Latin rhythms. But mostly *Lessness* is more.

On *Ouake*, Laster returns the favour, switching to alto sax in a quartet led by Friedlander, with Stomu Takahashi on bass guitar and Satoshi Tetsuchi on percussion. The cello, who still plays a classical compass, was inspired by Mark Robison's ironic calls in the string to Armando, and has worked with John Zorn and Gave Douglas. *Ouake* moves from chamberish and ironic to loud and free, with Satoshi's Tetsuchi a percussive riot rather than trap drummer the results should be interesting, but they haven't quite pulled me in yet.

LUESCHER/OLSHOUSEN/SU DEAR C: THE MUSIC OF CARLA BLEY

ATM 5100M AD 14 CD
Bass played almost Nathaniel Sze, from Cameron, is a latter disciple of Lee Konitz. With Fred Luescher on piano and Cécile Olshausen on cello, he produces distinctive chamber jazz interpretations of "Pier Carnivore," "Sing Me Softly Of The Blues" and other Carla Bley classics, together with Paul Riley's "Around Angel". The playing recalls the very satisfying trio of Carla Bley, Andy Sheppard and Steve Swallow, though these three musicians have a more classical feel. I've long admired Su's cool stylings, held in temper where his improvisation is possible, while displaying a gentle virtuosity at phrase endings. That the saxophonist records infrequently makes this gentle and beautiful release especially welcome.

MAX NAGL I CRASHED MY SNOWPLOUGH

FORNBERG ROBBER ARMAN: Herbert Reininger, Jander Thaler and Bernd Thaler, this CD reflects Max Nagl's sound art rather than his jazz or cafe society tendencies. The Austrian abelist has defined his style succinctly as "music composed by someone who grew up in the country playing clarinet mostly in marching bands, learned clarinet mostly in the conservatory to play piano, listened to lots of rock bands and jazz bands on records and radio and sometimes live, met lots of musicians of similar backgrounds in Vienna and formed his own bands". On the track, recorded in Australia a few years back, his son contributes high pitched whistles and whines against America's gentils but resistant drums and electronics. Another quirk from the quackiest Austrians.

ULLMANN/STEVES/FONDA/ BENNIG VARIATIONS ON A MASTER PLAN

ULM 11891 CD
Geirhard Ullmann is bass clarinetist with The Clearnet Trio, whose OCT 1, 98 was released in 1999. Here he also plays soprano and tenor saxes, in partnership with bassist Joe Fonda, a sometime Braden associate, Michael Jeffrey Stevens on piano and drummer Hen Bennek. Strikingly fluid between in and out playing. Variations repeats the strategy of the *Fonda/Stevens group's Live At The Banker* from 2000. It's a superior quality recording of a Munich gig, with background chatter edited out — except Fonda's, when he vocalizes along with his solos. The theme on Ullmann's "Variations On A Theme By Claude Debussy" is well disguised, though Stevens like Steve Delaney's wife harmonizes in his solo. *Nico Riedel's* "Parlons Of Me", arranged by Ullmann, also appeared in a more buxonic version on Oct 1, 98.

MATT WILSON HUMIDITY

PALMETTO PM8000 CD
Matt Wilson is an instantly melodic drummer — a quality that's often superficially overlooked, as least by drummers themselves. Since 1992 he's lived in New York, recording with Dewey Redman and in duet with Lee Kesterle on last year's *Gong With Ward*. On this quartet date with longtime partners, vibist Andrew O'Angelo and bassist Yasuhiro Inoue plus tenor saxophonist Jeff Labadie, his beautiful tone and timing feel compositions like "Thank You Billy Higgins", an Ornette-like tribute to the key drummer, featuring D'Angelo's bluesy alto in Coleman style, and Loderer's guff tenor "Well Shadows" and "Cooperation" are buxonic clarinet features, with O'Angelo on a woodie bass instrument, and an arco spot for Inoue, "Free Will" is a rampy valkyrie in "I Got Rhythm", though you'd be lucky to detect the changes, while "Don't Call Me" and "Birds" are Dameron's "Onelin' Get" are oblique needs to tradition. Wilson deserves wider recognition, and this is probably his finest album yet. □

Outer Limits

Reviewed by Jim Haynes

ANDREW DEUTSCH ELECTRONIC GARDEN

Andrew Deutsch has spent the majority of his free time building "electro-mechanical boxes" which originate from the sounds of broken music boxes as their spring motors wind down. Filtering these dainty phsyk-plinky tones through ring modulators and frequency shifters, he adds a digitized patina which unceremoniously sounds like many of the granular synthesis options within Max/MSP SuperCollider, and other similarly versatile software programs. Many of the resulting sounds resemble the whimsical electronics of Markus Popp solo and with Moritzhaus. However, Deutsch has decidedly different intentions for his Electronic Garden. He proposes these soundscapes are adaptations of Rudolf Steiner's ideals, in which music can strike a balance between the worldly body and the ethereal body. Deutsch intends that the shimmering tones of his music should heighten the latter and calm the former. This utopian aspect of his ideas hedge a little too close to New Age territory for my tastes, but the musical intentions succeed as pleasantly quirky experiences.

FORCEFIELD LORD OF THE RING MODULATOR BULB GLOBE RECORDS

Forcefield hail from the Rhode Island School of Costume Rock, graduating straight to the high art world with their undeniably impressive skills in hand-knit brightly colored body suits, which imbue the overbearing anonymity of an executioner's garb with grandma's coat, puppy-and-kitten-crocheted pillows and cushions inspired more by their knitting than their musical prowess. The whimsical artwork they reached its zenith with their performance at the 2002 Whitney Biennial, where some people speculated whether Forcefield had the potential to surpass the meta-linguistic hyperboles of The Berceuse or Mike Kelley in their play with their performance simultaneously evoked terror, humor, transcendence and earnestness. On the evidence of the dreadfully titled *Lord Of The Ring Modulator*, the answer is a resounding no. This unfortunate album paints Forcefield as the awkward equivalent of a one-hit wonder. Far from the repulsive, art-rock assaults of their live performances and the earlier *The Annual Regurgitation*, this is a clunky, minor-league noise album of ring plastic pulses and tepid distortion crackles. Evidently, Forcefield have spread themselves too thin, dabbling in snug post-psyic art gestures rather than attempting to wrangle with the complex, often impossible logic of noise.

JAVIER HERNANDEZ HYDRO PARNELIA GEOMETRIC GUTT RECORDS/NOGAMA MICROGRAMMA CD

With a resume taking up almost double columns as Xerox, Melanessia Senior and Situational dating back to the early 1980s, Barcelona

based post-industrial Javier Hernandez makes the case that Spanish electronic music existed before Barcelona's SONAR festival established the Catalan capital as a node in the global electronic network. Hyde Parnelia is a quiet album of radioactive vibrations, exploring the charms of skipping CDs, plastic bottles and blips as they dissolve in a generous helping of delay. It works best when Hernandez sets everything in reverse and floats his evocative half-melodies amidst unobtrusive, backward masked rhythms swathed in delay patterns. These tracks stand as digital pastiches of relations of the spectral disc abstractions found on Zovier's *Interdit's Mohavetoch*.

ROEL MEELKOP 4 (PROPOSITIONS) TARIFF TARIFFS CD

4 (Propositions) is an act if not especially inspired time for this latest album from aversive Dutch sound artist Roel Meelkop. For each of the four tracks does indeed make a distinct proposition for a simple acoustic drama played out between foreground and background, loud and quiet, synthetic and natural, etc. For Meelkop, who has worked extensively in the art and sound record both solo and as a member of Green, Kayote Music and TH:20, this is another very humble record to add to his discography. He's at his best when sonic patterns emerge within the quiet blurrings of misperceived field recordings or granular recombinations, which situate the reflected sounds of the listener's body within his compositions. Out of a concern to avoid any specific meanings attaching themselves to his work, Meelkop consistently pulls back to near silence when a tone lingers around long enough to stimulate images in his listeners, thus sullying his status as an avant-garde. The suggestive vocal parts from the first untitled track here might carry a hint of Luc Ferrari's psychosocial fears, but Meelkop's unyielding control doesn't allow for more than a brief titillation.

DANIEL MENCHE BEAUTIFUL BLOOD ALLEN J. ALLEN/CDG CD

Havens towled the American Noise community for almost a decade, Daniel Menche channels the physicality of raw tones into combustible explosions of chaos and discord. Within his ramorous recordings, he engages sound as spectral combatant, grinding, rumbling and slashing his source materials into incendiary channels alternated with smoldering abrasions like any majestic warrior. Menche has gained a considerable amount of wisdom about his adversary, and over the past couple of years, his strategies have shifted towards dialogue, compromise and the possibility of reconciliation. You can even say "Zer" to him these days without running the risk of suffering some glacial sonic retort. His recent music has gained slow his once characteristic expansive ebbs in order to assert expansive ebbs in order to assert expansive ebbs in order to assert expansive ebbs. Even so, he's still too music to enter

for his near minimalist studies to be mistaken for Zen meditation exercises. Here the music rapidly oscillates between metallic resonances, jet engine roars and soft ringing electricity.

DAVID LEE MYERS & THOMAS DIMIZIO UNCERTAIN SYMMETRY KORM PLASTICS KPM004 CD

CHRIS CUTLER & THOMAS DIMIZIO DUST

RIR MEGACORP CD RIR0005 CD

Some 12 years ago, West Coast electroacoustic composer Thomas Dimuzio and feedback sculptor David Lee Myers were working on a collaboration, when Myers abruptly dismantled all the feedback machines, which he had used on the stormingly bleak albums *Also Sprach Zarathustra* and *Itout* he studied under the name Arane Device, and ceased producing his brand of metal machine music. Happily, he is now back in business, and here he rekindles his long stalled collaboration with accomplished sound manipulator Dimuzio. His feedback machines might be ancient history, but Myers retains his lust for their tonal tribulations. For their parallel exercise in the use of feedback, Dimuzio and Myers filter, slice and twist their sonic waste away, cascading divers. At peak intensity, their jagged music threatens to pierce the skin.

Dimuzio's collaboration with drummer and Rirk boss Chris Cutler has a tendency to seed interesting details that never come to fruition. Their decision to produce the performance on Dust as a synthesis between room microphones and mixing techniques might account for the music's failure to sport this time round. Not a wise decision, considering that the spaces where these pieces were recorded had the acoustic clarity of a concrete warehouse. On Dust, their second album together, the duo's electronics and percussion improvisations, splatter jazz drum clusters over atonal synth tones and patiently squiggles. Cutler's percussive detailing is anything but bright, and most of the bass frequencies have the same impact of soggy tissue paper hitting a wet floor. For all the care they took with their mic set-up, in the hope of capturing the spontaneity of these performances, there's no getting around the fact that the album sounds terrible.

MNORTHAM A GREAT AND RIVERLESS OCEAN MYSTERY SEA MUSIC CD-R

SETH NEHL UMBRA

EDITION, NO NUMBER CD

Working almost exclusively with the symbolic elements earth, air, fire and water, the way Michael Northam (aka Utah-borne lower case sound artist mnortham) achieves syncretistic vibrations from field recordings and studio based effects is loaded with evocative biological potential. Within his dense layers of drones, Northam renews the

morphological complexities shared by things (by the refolding of molecules) and massive (the global shift of oceanic and atmospheric disturbances). With a title like *A Great And Riverless Ocean*, Northam's arthropods clearly invoke the aqueous environment — also apparently an ongoing concern of his label here, Mystery Sea. Yet his source material is somewhat unorthodox. He stretches water-borne sounds from a kelp hom — which is probably derived from a floating kelp plant turned into a makeshift resonator — and the enigmatic "wallach computer" into a hypogeic turbulence of subtle shifts and timbral refractions. *A Great And Riverless Ocean* conjures an empty comforting twilight space between conscious and unconscious perceptions of reality.

Seth Nehl has worked with Northam on a handful of releases and in the sound arts organization Diogenetics. Umbra, his latest set of drone studies, holds some obvious similarities to Northam's work. For instance, both he and Northam rely on the swarming choruses of sound that occur when layering multiple versions of its source on top of each other. They also decline their work as a form of some topography that insulates the patterns and ghostly echoes within ambient spaces, while drawing scientifically poetic analogies to the body and the environment. However, Nehl harvests comparatively more active sound fields for their recurrent tonalities. These often reflect an interest in performative actions such as rubbing textured objects against each other. Umbra is as a far more urgent recording than Northam's latest subdued production, yet both are incredibly strong works that warrant favourable comparisons to Phil Niblock and Francisco López.

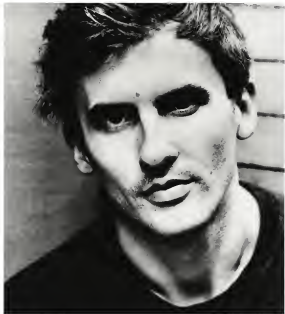
PHILIP SAMARTZIS MORT AUX VACHES STAPLAAT NO NUMBER CD

Australian sound artist Philip Samartzis revels in the technological recourses that meet sound engineers spend lifetimes attempting to eliminate. Such exuberance over surface noise began in the 1980s, when Samartzis worked with Andrew Curtis as Gum to produce a caustic, lo-tech bravura of turntable events and collaged detritus. Recently, he has taken a more direct approach that is heavily reliant upon digital technologies to emphasize each and every haptic bleat. His connection for the *Mort Aux Vaches* series is riddled with steady streams of abstruse gibberish, appearing simultaneously as clattering run-out grooves on abused vinyl and as layered cables popping with misaligned connections.

Despite its application of a digital sheen to highlight the white-hot energy wave that propels sound, Samartzis never corals this energy into the glitcheous structures championed by Raster-Notion. Rather, he leaves himself open to the rawness of electric failures stained with inimitable feedback, indeterminate buzzings and occasionally jarring chirps of silence. □

Print Run

New music books: devoured, dissected, dissed



Key player: Ray Riley, mid-60s

ALL MUSIC GUIDE TO JAZZ VLADIMIR BOGDANOV, CHRIS WOODSTRA & STEPHEN THOMAS ERLEWINE (EDITORS) BACKLICK PEEK \$39.95

BY ANDY HAMILTON

The *All Music Guide to Jazz*, now in its fourth edition, is a farther US rival to Richard Cook and Brian Morton's long established Penguin Guide to Jazz On CD, generally regarded as the most comprehensive and incisive on the market. It's similar in important respects to the American Musicland volume, reviewed in *The Wire* 190. This is a heavyweight encounter: Cook and Morton has 1,746 pages, Musicland 1390 and *All Music* 1472; but while Cook and Morton weighs in 1.5 kg, *All Music* is almost as massive as Musicland at 1.9 kg. In fact, *All Music* is a mere serious rival to the Penguin bible than Musicland proves to be — not least because it's got much smaller type and, I'd guess, twice as much text. Unlike Cook and Morton, *All Music* discusses deleted as well as currently available albums, though unlike Musicland it doesn't attempt to distinguish past. In contrast to Cook and Morton, it has a substantial bag for every musician.

The *All Music Guide* attempts to cover all stylistic and historical areas, and goes as far

back as Cook and Morton — to Bunk Johnson (1879-1949) and Freddie Keppard (1889-1933). In contrast to the pariet Penguin guide, it crosses genres by including people like Rahm Abo-Khalli, Antonio Carlos Jobim, Raymond Scott, R&B tenorists Hal "Combshead" Singer and Willis "Gator" Jackson, Fred Fith and The Last Poets. Where *All Music* has Kenny G, Slim Gaillard, Eric Gale, Richard Galliano, Jon Galloway and Hal Galper, Penguin has Slim Gaillard, Richard Galliano, Jon Galloway and Hal Galper. *All Music* takes the Musicland approach to an extreme, often with several contributors for each artist, reviewing one or more albums each — and because these reviews aren't well-coordinated, there's considerable repetition.

While there's a consistency to Cook and Morton, with the two editors contributing all the entries, *All Music* has over 200 contributors, though on almost every page there are reviews by Scott Yanow, who seems to have written a substantial portion of the book. Since many of the writers are writing about their favourite artists, there's sometimes more of a fan's perspective than a critical attitude. But in many cases the contributors have sought out obscure labels, and I was intrigued to discover that there's recorded evidence of Steve Lacy's unlikely

early career in Dixieland (The Complete Steve Lacy on Fiesco from 1954). Surprising omissions include Rob Masek, Enrico Plesnand, Carlo Acta Dato, Jay Clayton, Mike Osborne, Stan Tacey, Stefan Harris and Jason Moran. Highlights are long entries on Joe McPhee, Satoaki Fuji, Evan Parker, Arthur Blythe, Steve Lacy, Paul Riley and Frank Lowe, and briefer but valuable ones on Bosh Bergmas, Buell Neidinger, Paul Pimley and Mats Gustafsson.

The book begins with thumbnail sketches of the various jazz styles that have evolved over the past century — big, boogie-woogie, cool, free improv, etc. — and concludes with longer essays on history and genre, the earlier ones mostly by Scott Yanow and some excellent later ones by Eugene Chadbourne including "Jazz", the "NYC Scene 1980-2000" and the "Chicago Scene 1980-2000". Chadbourne explains how tension rose as critic Stanley Crouch and saxophonist Sam Rivers engaged rival left festivals in summer 1977; in a fight on the streets of SoHo, Rivers got the better of Crouch, whom some believe began the latter's dalliance with gente jazz. "Music Maps" trace lines of influence on each instrument, and even include accordion. Other quines include an entry on British dance-band leader Ambrose by someone called Uncle Dave Lewis, who gives three to five

star ratings to each of the discs he reviews. In fact even though each entry aims at completeness, three to five stars is the norm — seems like almost nobody ever recorded a bad album. Some discs are mentioned without a review, while Michael G Nastos gets a card, and maybe even got paid, for this critique of Harold Ousley's *The People's Groove*. "Saxophonist who worked with Dinah Washington. The all-star cast includes Ray McKinley (bass), Bobby Rose (guitar) and Norman Simmons (saxophone)."

Inevitably given the book's scope and the number of contributors, there are a number of critical missteps and odd judgments, and the sheer variety of opinions is bewildering. For example, Paul Riley is described as participating with Jimmy Giuffrè in the "first jazz trio to introduce microtonal improvisation", though I don't recall that early 60s group making any bigger thing of microtones than other jazz improvisors, but Riley is interestingly located as "the first direct — and for a long time only — counter to Cecil Taylor's explosive pianism" (presumably in free jazz). Nevertheless, the *All Music Guide* remains an essential purchase for any jazz lover or aspiring jazz lover, but you'll need to get your bookshelves reinforced, and unless you want to read it at a table, start lifting some weights. □

THE DEVIL'S SON-IN-LAW: THE STORY OF PETTIE WHISTRASTRAW & HIS SONGS PAUL GARON

CRISTIAN H. KOTER (HIS PINK & CD
BY VAN PUGHMAN)

Paul Garon is a living American musicalist whose previous works include a canonization of the glorious Morris Minnie, so he already has my vote before we even out the pages of this lovely pink leather and chicken yellow cover and steeply onto the terrain of the Devil's Son-in-Law.

Amidst a plethora of useful illustrations is a lovely diagrammatic graph by Franklin Rosemont called "The Luciferian Gesture, Or The Origin of Song," which pops the head of blues icon Pete Whistraw into a lattice of sigils and anagrams, and then tempted to say it's worth the price of admission alone even if the book is half bad; which it isn't. Devil's Son-in-Law is part of a lifelong project for Garon, who's written on the "poetic spirit of the blues," and who sees the lyrics of shadow men like Pete Whistraw as both idiomatic play in their own right (and writing, and rite), and as due reflections of their culture and time.

I can't remember reading a book on the blues that didn't send me to sleep since either Stanley Booth's *By Your Side* or John Folsky's *Bliss*

mograph on Charley Patton; before that, maybe the Gael MacRae chapter on the mystics of Stagger Lee in *Mystery Vibe*. The latter is a good reference point, so it happens: Garon's basic contention is that such common-property noisiness as *The Devil's Son-in-Law* or *The High Sheriff of Hell* (2001) are hand-down archetypes. Luga-like meeks which each singer, speaker or writer in turn can mold to their own face.

Petrie Whistraw was born William Bunch in either 1902 or 1904, in East St Louis, and died there in 1941 in the unfortunate meeting on a crossroads of a Buluk and a freight train. This story may already look familiar — echoes of Buddy Bolden, Robert Johnson, other mythic musical greatings. Except Bunch-ae-Whistraw — both solo or with a polka band of musical partners — left us 160 songs on 51 records. Garon's original text dates from 1970, but this reprint (from the notable "libertarian socialist" publishers Chax Press) comes with greatly helpful CD attached. It is able to read and listen, in parallel, makes all the difference here, I'd imagine; otherwise, Garon's text might at times feel a bit dry and quote-heavy, lyric-wise. As it is, it can be read at a sitting, with the CD on, a series of minor epiphanies in store like a living realization of Walter Benjamin's dream of a history writing in which there is a dialectical FLASH of

recognition when the atoms of the Past is struck by the fire of present research. The CD seems crucial to the success (although Garon also makes good use of pamphlets, photos, notes, bills, etc), and is a good pointer for other publishers to follow down the road.

In his way, Bunch-ae-Whistraw feels as contemporary as yesterday's "seeded on gun phaser" rapper. As for Whistraw's singer goes, his voice is not a pretty thing: it's harsh, strident, rough, catarrhal. Echoes of Bukka White, Leadbelly, A. RUFFINCK voice, far more (Busta Rhymes or J. Diddy) bastard than something more high and lonesome and sensuously romantic. An impression reinforced (like steel gear or ghetto concrete turned to art brut) by his inflection: launching into loudly idiosyncratic — like "Oh, little girl got SOGGISH" (from "The Weeks Old Blues"). If upstart is texture, the voice does have a happily humblingly clarity, squeezing a preternatural amount of word count into the constraint of strictly metered lines.

"Petrie Whistraw" was a party animal, but one who belied the suggestion of forbidden knowledge, unsold debts. We get blues as community news service, and political complaint, as well as 'per' plain bawdy. Garon's is a subtle demonstration of how a marginal figure, a forgotten man, who had a narrow stylistic row,

in a strained corner of a single neighbourhood, for a fairly short career, can nevertheless bequeath us his own kind of riches. As Petrie, Bunch has something to say about all the following subjects and more: booze, klanings, the talismans, the go-its (jams jams jams are forever), solitude, weather, Santa Claus, underwear, detectives, gambling, train times. It's far from rote, and there is much that is sheer linguistic PLAY going on here. (Other figures include how Lord Stingray and Mister Unwinked. Either of whom I'd be happy to buy a drink for.)

Garon's (wider) point is (wisely) undoes that it emerges all the same; he makes a strong case for this kind of an idealized an-essay unrelieved vermicular speech, as a "text of resistance"; as simultaneously poetic trace and protestant record. But it's not a point he labours to the detriment of the canny evoked texture of a moment in time — and noisiness — which seems to contain multitudes. (Multitudes of pseudonyms alone.)

"HARD some time, ain't it?" Whistraw's low-key but shivering snarl barks out of the CD. Such moments still have power to stop the breath. "His name was ringing," says a contemporary of Whistraw's. It rings still, thanks in no small part to Garon's daintily handled obsession with the man-rhyme. □

THE SECOND SENSE: LANGUAGE, MUSIC AND HEARING

ROBIN MACONIE
SCARLETON PRESS HSB H30
BY ANDY HAMILTON

Robin Maconie was an assistant of Stockhausen who, like most of them, eventually fell out with the Master, but not before compiling the available Stockhausen On Music. He's also produced the very worthwhile title *The Concept Of Music and The Science Of Music*, and this new "volume of ruminations about music" picks up on themes discussed there. Inspired by a course on music appreciation Maconie once taught, he describes it as a course in "listening skills" which emphasises classical music because it's the best material for that purpose. More introductory than his earlier books, and more background on classical composers, Maconie nonetheless covers some subtle and refreshing ideas. Underlying themes include the idea of music and musical instruments as signalling devices, and the arrival of an ancient conception of music as science as well as art. Although he's short-winded in argument as before, where Maconie scores is in his suggestive, often idiosyncratic, sometimes infuriating insight on the philosophy of music.

The earlier chapters are the least satisfying — or maybe I just found them too introductory. Chapter one begins with an unhelpfully broad definition of music as "any acoustic activity intended to influence the behavior of others", the sort of a horn or the chirping of a bird, like a concerto or symphony, can be understood as an "acoustic signalling process... In every case there is a need to get the attention of an audience

and deliver a message", Maconie dreams. This is one of his favourite themes, but it needs a lot more elucidation than he gives it, despite numerous examples. Handel's *Water Music*, for instance, "signifies a special occasion..." (The music says) 1. King George is keen to communicate with his subjects: 2. He has a powerful voice; 3. He represents order and harmony; 4. He is in charge. A similar message might come from a car at a red light quivering off Huddersfield 120 lb. Later, Maconie repeats his comment in the Concept Of Music that a child running around shouting in a new environment is researching it sonically.

Another key theme is music and science, "Planchini is [an] expression of science preserved as musical art", Maconie claims. He develops an intriguing parallel between the superhuman scale and detailed human ornament of a Gothic cathedral, and the prolonged works of medieval composer Hildegard von Bingen and its paucity and intricate chord reduction. He explains how the unusually long recitation time of a cathedral acoustic was not just to its size and volume, but also to the vast surface area expanded by irregularities of ornamentation, resulting in complex sound reflection. Maconie distinguishes three kinds of musical space: real space (exploiting real distance and directional effects), virtual space (the imitation of those in recording, for instance), and pitch space (the sense of a musical note being high or low). But again Maconie is too free, for a fuller discussion you need to turn to Roger Scruton's *The Aesthetics Of Music*, where the essential claims about real causality between sounds and virtual causality between tones survive the conservative, anti-modernist presentation. Scruton develops

Pierre Schaeffer's compelling claim that musical experience involves acoustic experience of a world of tones abstracted from their physical origins as sounds, which calls into question Maconie's focus on signalling.

Still exploring the connection between music and science, Maconie describes the origins of the pipe organ as an instrument to check the uniformity of air pressure in different outlets of a Baroque underfloor heating system. He repeats the story that the Industrial Revolution began in England when Josiah Wedgwood, attending a performance of one of Haydn's "London" Symphonies, realised he could apply the division of labour of the orchestra to the manufacture of quality chinaware. On the development of orchestral instruments, Maconie comments that the spike on a cello and the legs of a piano don't just raise the instrument to the right height, they also feed bass responses into the floor and room structure. The keyboard in a Baroque orchestra is provided for members of the orchestra to hear — it has the conductor's role.

Other chapters include "Music/Music" on Kurt Schwitters and text-based sound art, and "Directions" — notation, that is — where Maconie reports the amusing story that Samuel Beckett, one of the first writers to use dots to indicate length of breathations, once refused an actor for pausing for only three dots instead of four. "Inspiration", about music and the moving image, compares DW Griffith's use of long shots to capture multiple incidents within a single frame, with Charles Reis's simultaneous presentation of different musical events in pieces like Washington's Birthday. The chapter on recording, "Memory", discusses the novel remastering technique of the new digital

archival classical label Nimbus Records. Instead of direct transfer of tapes, they recorded from playback on a contemporary gramophone with plant cactus spine needle, allowing for less frictional noise and greater bass response.

But Maconie's aesthetic reflections on high fidelity, frustratingly obscure in the Concept Of Music, have become pervasive. Multi-microphone — to pick out solo passages in a symphony orchestra, for instance — doesn't give greater clarity, as Maconie suggests, just greater separation or prominence. More basically, he writes that "the traditional symphony orchestra is essentially a monaural music scene intended for single channel reproduction", claiming that stereo only really brings greater realism for works like Monteverdi's *Il pastor Fido* or Gabriel's *Canto*, which have a spatial separation unusual among classical compositions. In an earlier chapter Maconie negates the decline of interest in spatial effects between Monteverdi and the classical orchestra, "invisible when the magnificent acoustic space that gave rise to this resonance polychord are abandoned for smaller and lighter sonorous endocams". He's right; it's strange that he neglects the fact that our two ears yield spatial perception of sound, listen to a mono recording and it's not easy to give rise to a sense of recording venue, and whether the virtual listener is close to the orchestra or in the back row of the stalls. Maybe this is Maconie repeating Stockhausen's criticisms of the traditional orchestra and the concert hall acoustics listening it implies, which neglects the possibility of "theatrical polyphony". But when he's just being provocative and not perceptive, the Second Sense is an entertaining read — an unusual book that's highly recommended. □

The Inner Sleeve

Selected this month by Kim Hiorthøy

Cat Power: *Moon Pix* (Matador) 1998 (photos: Roe Ethridge)

In 1999 I got to borrow a flat off a friend of a friend in Copenhagen. His name was Fleming. Fleming had this kind of display rack for LPs on his wall, in which he kept the records he had been listening to last. The rest of his substantial vinyl record collection (at least compared to mine) sat on a sturdy shelf to the side, in alphabetical order, with all spines in perfect alignment ("yes, it is sick," he told me later). Before putting my bags down (Fleming had left), I went over and picked up Cat Power's *Moon Pix* which was sitting in

Fleming's fancy rack. I didn't really like the music at first, but I kept listening to it because I really wanted to like a record that I liked looking at so much. It's not only that the photographs on the back and front by Roe Ethridge are so good, it's the whole impression, and because I don't have a life, I can spend days obsessing over these things. The cut corners, the white borders, the corniness of Chas Marshall's kind of posing but also not posing and almost the same on both sides but white on the back, and the way her teeth look, and

eyes, and the red writing on the front and the strange words, and I didn't know if it was a band or if the band's name was Moon Pix or Cat Power or what, and the flowers and her hand as if she is coming out of some forest or something, and of course I'm being pathetic and I should have chosen some cool Designers' Republic sleeve or something, but *Moon Pix* is the best sleeve that I know. □ Based in Oslo, Kim Hiorthøy is an artist, musician, photographer, film maker, and graphic designer, most notably for the Rune Grammofon label.



Cross Platform

Sound in other media. This month: Ken Hollings finds virtual cities, digital earthquakes and viral ruins in the shattering audiovisuals of Semiconductor



Earthquake ethos: Semiconductor's Ruth Jarman and Joseph Gerhardt, plus stills from their apocalyptic animation

When they perform live, there's nothing to see. Just two figures hunched over laptops in darkness, arms occasionally reaching through the field of light cast by a carefully positioned lamp. Nobody's really paying much attention to Ruth Jarman and Joseph Gerhardt, the shadowy duo behind Semiconductor's audiovisual assaults upon human consciousness. Over the past four years, from their hideaway in Brighton on England's south coast, they have been creating a stream of sound films, computer-animated music videos and multimedia happenings that explore the deep new terrain opening up in the cracks between the visual and the auditory, the abstract and the figurative, the spontaneous and the preprogrammed. On screen, an electrical storm rages in slabs of the dark sky between tower blocks. Cities of gigantic proportions come apart, reassembling themselves according to a disturbing logic that only they seem to understand. Cellular entities battle each other in a dazzling submolecular domain. Dimensions heave and shift. All sense of scale and stability has long since disappeared. Semiconductor is the brand name for digital noise and computer anarchy.

"We spend a lot of time removing default settings in the computer which try to keep things 'clean' or 'realistic' and alternatively try to find approaches which may disrupt the way software has been trained to present information," Jarman and Gerhardt explain. "We need to steer it rather than be steered by it. The computer is considered to lack soul, but our demands require it to overcome this."

Advances in the real-time processing of audiovisual data not only mean that old hierarchical relationships between music and moving imagery are being dismantled, but new hybrid forms are also coming into being. The line between abstraction and representation is rapidly becoming blurred. Reflecting electronic music's plunge into digital noise and sample degradation, Semiconductor have proposed the notion of "Artificial Expressionism," an appropriately functional term for a historically messy territory. "It appears as a contradiction," they concede, "yet it's actually suggesting something playful. It informs a pledge between the artist and the computer. The 'artificial' is representing something very rigid which exists as a series of rules and made up of zeroes and ones. By bringing expression to this, which is the human element, we are introducing a form of chaos

which disrupts any predetermined outcome."

The perfect expression of this creative chaos lies in the tensions the duo chart between the self-replicating grandeur of urban architecture and the forces of nature advanced in storms and earthquakes. "They set a scale, a human scale and a point of reference. Earthquakes and natural disasters are reminders of our place in our constructed environments and of the bigger picture. We use them as animation tools to deconstruct and mess things up. They are tools, in the same way computers are to us." From the dancing buildings in *Earthquake Films*, giving visual form to songlines "sung" into being by an earthquake, to the electrical meltdown of *Retropolis* and a sombre flickering of inaudible *Cities: Part 1*, Semiconductor trace the outline of structures in a state of flux, and mark the effect of sound traveling through the visual order of things.

In 2003, Semiconductor took the step of releasing eight of the sound films on the Hi-Fi Riser: *Some Cities From Another Timeline DVD*, one of the first ever independently released DVD-ROMs. The interface for accessing the ROM presented the film choices within an architectural arena awaiting exploration. "Lines" shows the subatomic vibrations of a city made up of tiny resonating wires; "New Antics" captures simple life forms in action; while "Migration" offers a voyage through a constantly evolving landscape. Also included is their sense-shredding 80-second "sound recording of the 20th century," "AZ of Noise".

"With this piece we started with a single black frame of video and added a filter that cleans and sharpens the image each second for the one-minute duration, similarly with the audio, starting off with a one second sound clip of noise and using a noise reduction process to sterilize the information. So as each medium of sight and sound had a digital cleansing process applied to them it brought out qualities and matter that wasn't there before and letting the computer reveal something very true to itself but directed by us. This introduced a nice contradiction, trying to clean pure noise, where noise is all the unwanted information we experience." Created in 1999 and lexically flipping Rosalind's 1943 Futurist tract *The Art Of Noise*, its screenised digital graininess expresses, as Semiconductor explain it, "a growing paranoia of civilization imploding or even exploding, and that this was to be longed for, not feared".

Also included on the DVD is a selection of work by other artists working in the same area of sound film and music video, including *People Like Us* and *Yvette Klein*. Semiconductor have worked with a number of musicians and labels, most notably creating music sleeves for Fat Cat Records and DAT Politics, creating sleeve art for innovative Mikrofonisch offshoot Supremat, and becoming resident visual artists for Warp's recent Nesh club nights in London.

"Not only does this allow us to develop our skills and see new potentials in our relationship with the computer, but we get to form work and take risks we wouldn't necessarily do in our own work. Fat Cat in particular have a very trusting approach towards their artists, and their reputation proves this pays off. You don't often meet producers who generously give you total freedom. Fat Cat also lends us their audience, giving our work a different context."

Standouts have included the dreamy video narrative for "Green Grass Of Turner" by Icelandic Múm, transforming the lighthouse and valley where the group used to live into a darkly protean version of Moomin Valley, and QT-Digital Anthrax, a delicious pop world where viruses battle it out for the survival of the fittest, accompanied by QT's 56 second composition "egg". The duo has also been picked to set up a site specific installation with sound animations to accompany work by sculptor Richard Wentworth at Venice Biennale's Zenobia Pavilion, opening this month.

Digital Anthrax, which now forms part of their live audiovisual set, points towards a regime in which animated forms hurl themselves, like abstract cartoon characters, into real-time conflict. "We program our own 3D environments which we navigate and have audio triggers synced with animations. The alternative is to fall for digital clichés or use real-time algorithms which tend to control the output." Expectations are dislocated; senses re-engaged. "Noise is unwanted sensory information," Semiconductor remark in relation to their live work. "In the world of computers everything is clean, so for humans to live comfortably they need to add some noise. The idea of noise is both visual and audible. We see a parallel of senses: not a jarring of two senses, but [treating them as] the same thing. Feels like computer anarchy. Computers can only simulate it." □ Website: www.semiconductorfilms.org

Cross Platform



Left: Men or myths: Miles Davis on DVD. Right: Ego Trip's Wheel Of Fortune at BMI's Pop Music Conference

THE MILES DAVIS STORY

BY IAN PENMAN

He was a musician, Miles, not a boxer, not a pimp, not the mayor of Handasse street. He's installed now as a given on the Raas-ist cultural index, which is how glossy new hip-sham Kapital gets round its iconoclasm: these days — by making one form of glossy BIO pic or other from theirs, eliding thereby the trouble of actually having to listen to or (God forbid!) argue the tosa with them.

You do wonder if a thumbed-nose Paul Whitehouse seltch about secretly hating Miles might not be far more in the spirit of Miles than some softly-softly adobe-rover documentary which this profile (directed by Mike Gibb; originally shown on Channel 4 in 2001), while it isn't as far as Blackpool sand on summer holidays, it's many miles from THE DUTY OF DISOBEDIENCE any DVD could and maybe ought to reference and embody.

Downcounties like this, they seem to have everyone and everything, but then the next day you think hang on, that didn't answer (or even ask) the even basic questions about... Like, do Miles have a sense of humour? (Would he have found that Paul Whitehouse sketch hilarious?) Or was his wit dry and heavy and dangerously unstable? If you had called him an Imp of the Perverse in his coiled-up state... whatever this hot factor is what I miss in island, hot, honorable old, passing X-certificates profiles like this — an itch or perversity that might mirror, if only glancingly, the height of its subject, who was, after all, a very surprising musician, and not a cotwank model, not a political lobbyist, and not someone who let jazz become a set of traffic lights and a white box you were either INSIDE or OUT.

If we can't yet imagine a similar doc about Anthony Braxton, say, or George Russell, that already says a mouthful, I think, about what is going on here as an example of the 'have your cake and condemn it' approach: is you get kudos for 'doing Miles', but still get viewing figures via the scummy scab-pick stuff about drugs and illness and incarceration and retreat and blood and suddenness: a quasi-sensational POV which

throws everything in without getting us within
hurting distance of the insoluble truth of a
parched, volcano-wine solo.

[What if it were even best not to know Miles from a hole in the air? What if it were best to know only the music — like Joanne Moreau's character in *Lift To The Scaffold*, say, to be conscious of this rainy day music as only a whisp of unobscured desire in your own lonely city air?]

As for as music goes, some of the shadow box can be caught here between the polka-coag interview lines. Nice discreet boys like deobothie, McLaughlin, Corea, who for once in their life let the sound of de monic phases come flooding down and out of their sleeves. Miles needed them — this shiny black panther whose mud fluid breakthrough **CLICKED** within the collective mindwarp of white fellow travelers, the electronic hounsa whose own tastes ran to Debussy and Ravel. But his partners meant obviously one hell lotta, have any of them ever again brushed against anything like Miles-moment intensity or invention or grace? (Some even needed a new RELIGION after Miles, and what does that involve tell us?)

Miles as musician, that, doesn't cancel out Miles as social magus, Miles as sonic crucible, Miles as racial/cultural alchemist: first reducing (gliding down people) then elevating (raising his players' game) using only his mouth and his fingers and his ear, that strange unknowable place Miles's ear, his back turned to audiences not as a sign of refusal, but of rigorous assent: hearing comes first here, do you see, not seeing. Hear what I think, don't judge who you are. And what if someone made a documentary like Miles heard the sky? Like Miles heard his own blood? Like Miles heard the approach of the colorless... End?

GIL SCOTT-HERON
BLACK WAX REVISITED

CHAPTER 50
BY ANN SCHMAN

BY PAUL EMMAN
OF THE NEW YORK TIMES

GIL is one of history's nice guys—or at least, that's the easy option to push, and this profile sticks to that view, no shadow side, things nice and laid back and GIL urbane and sharp as always but at times maybe looking like a tiger crouching on his

best behavior for a job interview, but mainly it's good old GQ Scott-Heron, still alive, nicely funky, breathing in and breathing out, still this handsome for what — how old must he be now?, a man who took his anger seriously enough that he found a new framework for it to gambol in and it sure ain't no trail to watch him speak — making words twist and job and turn — or let your head dance to the sprightly live music, or follow him as he goes strolling through Washington on a red dotted line somewhere between the White House and the ghetto, somewhere between the folks on the street and the killing rock, and oh he's been that before, a man with a white cane and crack/cocaine problems, which maybe just maybe indicate that living inside Gila skin ain't always simply this groovy Jazz Cafe social picnic we'd like to think is.

This is a bit's tape: nothing very radical or head bunting or even DVD oddity, or even very current about it, it being mostly a re-sop of GIs' year-year thing (thus: Ronald 'Ray-gun' jokes), not that I shan't in all likelihood turn and return to it again and again in those mean red moods when I need to feel there is still hope at large in the world... but I wanted more: I wanted more because he was one of the people who taught me to always want more, especially of the people you most cherish.

Does he grouse and growl at Spike Lee films like the rest of us, does he cry out loud at The Bush Family sitcom or laugh at The Simpsons (and who does he most identify with therein?), does he read Faulkner, who was it first inculcated poetry in his bones... how's he feeling right now, today, in America?

POP CONFERENCE 2003
SEATTLE EXPERIENCE MUSIC
PROJECT

USA

BY OUR 10-CLIQUE TIME

it felt risky, somehow, bringing together so many members of the North American popular music criticism establishment under one roof. Especially this roof, the rapping metallic lid of Frank Gehry's Fender-inspired building for Seattle Experience

Music Project, with the spire of the Space Needle towering over it, looking like nothing so much as a gigantic lightning rod. If lightning had struck, well — suffice to say there would have been no one left but the *Mothers*.

Organized by Eric Weisbard and a programme committee including EMP's Ann Powers, Gail Marcus, The Village Voice's Robert Christgau, Princeton's Gaphne Brooks, and the New York Times's Kalafatis Saneah, among other critics, EMP's second annual Pop Conference brought together over 100 academics and journalists to address the theme, "Skip A Beat: Rewriting The Story Of Popular Music".

The two days of presentation and discussion were largely fruitful, turning from the historical to the frankly hysterical. A theme as broad as this year's, of course, could encompass any number of topics, and so panels ranged from Orythology to 'art music' to sampling to gender. Caphrie Brooks read Jeff Buckley through the filter of Nina Simone and black feminist rock criticism. Jon Caramanica considered the rise of the Southern bummer rapper. Tim Lawrence explored the austere history of New York underground disco, while Charles Norengold offered a fascinating musicological reading of 'acoustic' disc.

Some of the best presentations arrived from the paper format: prominently from Kipp and Silkwood's Tim Midgitt explored the heremennities of bad rock, piecing together a multimedia presentation brimming with rock slides, piano ostinatos, and the "coverbel as universal party-dance signifier." And New York's Eric Tipow, velveteen of underground and mainstream Hip-hop publishing, used the Wheel Of Fortune format to spool on just about every angle of the pop game, with categories ranging from politics ("Political Rap: Go the Fuck Back to Africa") to authority ("Which White Music Critics Think He Knows More About Rap Than You? [Answer: All of 'em]"). The crew's anachronistically non-criticalist aesthetic approach to gender ("Women in Rap: Who Cares?") drew us from shits, quite deservedly. But those Bangladesi designated for their onces was refreshing in a world of PC academics and



Carsten Nicolai's *Telefunken* (left) and Bernhard Leitner's *Head Spaces* at Vectors

professional courtesy. As a redemptive gesture, perhaps, they led the room full of critics in a karaoke singalong to Missy Elliott's "Work It." The moment of levity might not have rewritten the story of popular music, but it reinforced the reasons that critics, more often than not, are best left doing the typing, not the singing.

VECTORS: DIGITAL ART OF OUR TIME NEW YORK COURTYARD GALLERY AT THE WORLD FINANCIAL CENTER USA

BY LINA GOUVEROVID-RUSSELL

New York's digital art scene is opening the tenth incarnation of the New York Digital Salon—

the annual international exhibition of digital art organized by the School of Visual Arts. To mark the anniversary the curators set out to stage the most ambitious Digital Salon to date—an international survey of New Media art devoted to the works of digital art pioneers and contemporary masters.

The exhibition took place at the Courtyard Gallery of the World Financial Center, located next door to Ground Zero. Using the all-American "top ten" formula in his curatorial approach, Digital Salon director Bryce Winder invited ten leading curators from major art institutions worldwide asking them to nominate ten pieces. The exhibition turned out to be a pithy attempt at covering too wide an area in too broad a stroke, resulting in a messy jumble of online projects, installations, music and video works. The disappointment doubled when the

exhibition only contained 30 works after publicizing a list of over 100 artists. The remaining works were to be seen online or read about in the catalogue.

Despite an obvious effort to deal with audio art and electronic music (only included for the first time last year), little effort was made to soundproof the spaces, creating a severe sound bleed between installations. The least successful of all was a "sound art" room, a small area with several seats, a monitor and speakers. Playing a CD on station, the selected works included Cecilia Le Piaz's *Le Triangle* (Dharmavathi), Daniel Teruggi's *Flightless Vox*, and David's *Overlapped* 2000, but flimsy plastic sheets installed to isolate the sound made it impossible to actually distinguish one piece from another.

Of all the audio works only Carsten Nicolai's

Telefunken, a minimalist three screen installation led by an audio signal leading an array of white noise patterns onto the screens, and Bernhard Leitner's *Head Spaces*, stood a chance of being heard and seen without any major obstacles. *Head Spaces*, being a virtual three-dimensional sculptural work designed especially for headphones, aimed at mapping the interior space of the head, actually provided a welcome chance to plug out of the aural and visual disarray around. The over ambitious curatorial policy coupled with an inappropriate space (and obvious budgetary constraints) combined to make Vectors a trivial and inadequately presented exhibition, only saved by a thorough catalogue in the form of a special issue of the *Leonardo Journal*. □

Go To:



For anyone left hungry for more after reading our Soft Machine Primer (see page 48) **Collapsos:**

The Canterbury Music Family Tree

(www.canterburymusicfamilytree.com) offers an extensive useful breakdown of who did what when in that convoluted lineage. Finding out how Whitesnake may or may not be related in a roundabout way to Gong is half the fun here, while taking in *Canterbury*, *Matching Male*, *Henry Cow* and *Egg* along the way. But be warned: The family tree resembles a medical chart.

Those intrigued by the three day, 21 hour, 38 minute, three second *Farmers Market* DVD containing pretty much every live recording they ever did from 1995 to now (reviewed on page 60), can try before they buy their **Recent Live Archive** (live.archive.com) contains the whole lot—download at your leisure, gratis and for nothing. The temple of industrial and experimental art.

Brainwashed (www.brainwashed.com/), has added another element to their already sprawling site. Besides weekly album reviews, *The Brain* now also sports the Eye, a weekly video feature on an artist with live clips and words from the artists themselves, starting with Emil Bouquillon of *RRRecords*. Bouquillon resides in Lowell, Massachusetts and "has been listed America's Greatest Living Noise Artist" (by

whom, we wonder?). Upcoming features include *The Dirty Threes*, *The Sea And Cake*, *The Newlist*, *Brokeback*, *Callhome*, *Thalia Zedek*, and *Cox*.

Guitarist **Hans Reichel** (www.daxo.de), inventor of the legendary diaphanous and angular presence on the German label FMR, has a playful online presence. Chock full of interactive games and short animations, his homepage contains plenty of information about his compositions and design, as well as images and audio samples from his many invented guitars.

Blogging is the new Mobbing. Or so it seems with at least two Wire contributors this month. Since Reynolds's **Blissout** (blissout.blogspot.com) is a strictly music related affair, with Reynolds in meteorologist mode. With one finger in the air to feel which way the wind's blowing, he is currently updating a "Stocks And Shares Index Of Influences For Rock Bands" which he originally scribbled for the now defunct *Cozard* magazine in 1994. At the time he categorized groups in sections such as "Passé" (Gang Of Four), "Hot... For Now" (Can), "Like Hot" (Horsefly, Shiny Bands), and "Beyond The Pale Of Rehabilitation" (i.e., Midnight Oil), and so on. He's now asking for outside suggestions to update the index. Ian Penner's **Pixbox**

(www.pixbox.blogspot.com/) is a far more personal and glibly effusive. Subtitled "A Catalog Of Culture & Banality" (from the lovably reproduced quote, "There is no document of culture that is not one of banality as well" — W. Benjamin), the good Penner, also operating as "Pawboy", offers his observations on *The Byrds*, *Bogies's* cat (and his own troupe of felines, which he observes gumballing in his garden), *Flash and APF* (American Foreign Policy) in general, *Pasolini* quotes, plus a handful of other topics and learned and whimsical asides. Well worth a daily click.

TWANSBO (www.twansbo.org/blog.html) is another blog, updated daily, somehow abetting *No Wave*, *La Monte Young* and *Joe Mafia*. The related site **Hollowearth** (www.hollowearth.org), an illustrated and animation site, contains two treats in the section devoted to music: "Laurdette", a UK post punk MP3 compilation featuring such luminaries as *Valerine Golden*, *General Strike*, *The Heat, Plut and Sons Politix*; while "Vintage Arkivore (Do You Know The Scene?)" is another edit altogether: rough riding, breakbeat cuts by *Chilipee*, *Nookie*, *Bodycatcher*, and *A Guy Called Gerald*. Now that's what I call nostalgia.

ANNE HILDE MESEY

On Location

Live and kicking: festivals, concerts, events in the flesh



ALL TOMORROW'S PARTIES UK CAMBER SANDS HOLIDAY CENTRE UK

BY JOHN MULVY

After three days at All Tomorrow's Parties, it's easy to take the magnificent strangeness of the wholehearted endeavour for granted. Only occasionally with a jolt of pleasure, are you reminded how the extreme has been normalised within this weatherbeaten old English holiday camp. Maybe it's 20 minutes into Bernard Parmegiani's *De Natura Sonorum*, when one of the festival crew emerges to redirect the attentions of the audience, who have been patiently engrossed watching an empty stage.

Parmegiani is, in fact, operating the mixing desk, transforming his electroacoustic suite into a spacious architectural space, building sound clusters in the corners of the room while his notable live performance—Jim O'Rourke, Peter Rehberg, Curtis Roads—look on admiringly. It is the third evening of the festival, another day by Autzche, and the sense of being insulated from the mundane is all-pervasive. Granular synthesis, rather than garage rock, is the inescapable contemporary soundtrack. In the company, The Magic Band and The Fall resemble conventional rock archetypes. The real world isn't entirely banished, but seeps in subliminally—news reports from the live invasion are piped continuously into the toilets, albeit at barely audible volume.

Autzche's personal profile is characteristically low, restricted to a heavily digital DJ set at Gosport on 3am on Saturday morning. Their cultural impact, though, is everywhere. Megamillions, their selected bill often sounds like a way of tying themselves into a musical continuum, to deprive the notion that they are detached innovators working in something of a vacuum. So traces of their serpentine, fluctuating music may find its way into the "fast-food symphonies of Parmegiani in the party's ambient distractions of Curtis

Roads, in the manic sleeping music of Yasuo Kato, in the belligerent wails of Rohan Hecker.

It would be easy to hear the pervading sound of the festival as a kind of polyphonic electronics, especially given the presence of Hecker and a platoon of his fellow Mega artists. But also Peter Rehberg begins Saturday afternoon's ball with a characteristic, multi-textured mix of laptop music that patiently and gradually resolves into a booming melody. *Parma's Manual*, meanwhile, epitomizes the passive/aggressive nature of improvised electrical fear: men absorbed by their lipos, flouted with the power of tiny adjustments, triggering a sequence of impassive throwdowns, more like chess players than collaborators.

But Autzche are no drier, too slippery, for their All Tomorrow's Parties to be quite so predictable. From Friday evening onwards, it's apparent that the dominant emotion shared by a vast majority of the performers here is a fear of repetition. From freestyling anyone to digital improvisers, a good many participants appear obsessed by the notion that art at its most powerful when it is unpredictable. There are exceptions, of course—Parmegiani's rigorous composition and The Magic Band's scrupulous rehearsal are two key examples—but still, this is music which synthesises the spontaneous and unpredictable even when it is methodically planned.

The Fall, of course, always give that impression, no matter what line-up Mark E. Smith chooses to torment. The air of imagined psychosis, of going through the non-conformist motions, is pleasingly strong here. The sound is spindly, rudimentary and tart, with Smith perversely choosing a set that draws heavily on his commercial heyday in the mid-80s. So the desecrated paranoid mirth of "No New Porn" is inflated once again, alongside an elaborated, sort of funny "Telephone Thing" and a rare re-examination of "I Am David Suck" that tops blazingly into doom. It's basic. Well, after a ballad.

Public Enemy, too, present something of a greatest hits set, but it's meticulously far from the casual presentation some had feared. The critical elements of choice have been re-discovered, even though Chuck D, Flavor Flav

and Professor Griff are now backed by a modular live group as well as the excellent DJ Lord (filling in for Terminator X, in semi-retirement on his stretch furl). Seeing PE buffeted about the stage by "Bring The Noise" or "Rebel Without A Pause" is a reminder that their power always derived from the uncompromising nature of their sound as much as their debaucherous looks. The latter is still potent, with Chuck D denouncing the war even as one of his enforcers grooves next to him with a dog-eared sign proclaiming, "T-shirts \$10." It's a long, a newish show, but at its best it's outstanding. And at its worst, it's compellingly weird. Flavor Flav's extended drum solo, Professor Griff dropping "Whole Lotta Love" as his rap metal showcase... For this weekend at least, the ancient claims of PE being the best rock 'n' roll group in the world seem curiously accurate.

Autzche's reputation as delirious B-boys assures that HipHop provides human engagement throughout the weekend. Brooklyn's percolous obscure Thirstin Howl III and his crew are AIP's most endearing and bewilled veterans. Viewing Brian through a prism while they try to work out where they are, they go on to reveal their tight honours with the bitches "I Still Live With My Mom." B-P is as fierce and articulate as ever, and his juxtapositions of the personal, political and farcical, notably in the remarkable "Steelhead Factory", confirm him as his content on a level of spiritual her to Chuck D. But Kool Keith is the weekend's biggest disappointment. Not only is he laconic and monstrous, he's also hindered by some rotten self-promotion by his producer/DJ Kutmastra Keith.

Exactly where Sune Ojii fits in is harder to say. They have been entrusted with a spot early on Sunday morning between unusually accessible sets from Russell Howell and The Apeas Twin, the latter finding if his worst baggy instincts until the final stages of his DJ stint. Sune Ojii, finally, inherit the slot originally given to their mentors Earth, who pulled out at the last moment (apparently they forgot they needed passports to leave America). Their noisive doom drone has the rare gift of being both transporting and preposterous. Dressed in amorphic robes and

illuminated by flickering candles, Greg Anderson and Stephen O'Gilly carve great slow motion arcs with their guitars, and an anonymous vocalist (not Arnie Cope, as has been widely rumored) in Nordic Metal facepaint kneels down, shows two teeth into his mouth and lets out a giant wailing "Om." It's one of the weekend's highs.

The other, perhaps, is Jim O'Rourke's set on Sunday afternoon. Beginning as a familiarly splintered laptop workout, it progresses through a compressed digest of avant garde tropes before focusing on a beautiful scintillating drizzle which he gently manipulates for some 20 minutes. It's a relief, perhaps, to find guitar music finding a resolution of sorts in a festival where—save the warm Mo'Nashua of and and a few Techno DJ sets—the music has been characterized by a sense of endlessness.

Hence the return of The Magic Band on Sunday night, banished without Captain Beefheart. It all feels a little like an exercise in bogus authenticity. After all, these five musicians never actually played together, and while John "Dumbo" French undeniably sounds like Beefheart, it's arguable whether The Magic Band's drummer (given impressions is any more wild than a total newcomer singing the songs. Two thirds of the way through their nonetheless enduring set, the fire alarm sounds and the building is evacuated. It turns out to be a false alarm. Perhaps it was Beefheart, getting his own look. When everyone returns, they're more relaxed, and French's back through "Big Eye Beans From Venus" makes a fitting conclusion to this most contentious and rewarding of festivals.

Like so much else here, it's an exploration of music while rigidly enforced parameters—as if in order to be adventurous, artists must stay true to fundamental dictates about who they should sound. Like freedom necessarily comes from self-restriction. We're reminded, too, of Sonic Youth set three years ago, when their SHP style improvisations were based by a crowd expecting something like a greatest hits show. It wouldn't happen now. As the musical possibilities of All Tomorrow's Parties have expanded, so have the perspectives of their audience. An adventure playground for Wile makers, no less. □

All tomorrow's party people. Top: The Magic Band. Middle row left to right: B-P, Sune Ojii, Mark E. Smith. Bottom row from left: Peter Pan, The Apeas Twin.

SONIC YOUTH: STAN BRAKHAGE MEMORIAL BENEFIT NEW YORK ANTHOLOGY FILM ARCHIVES USA

BY MARC MASTERS

From the 1950s until his death from cancer in March, Stan Brakhage was arguably America's greatest living visual artist. If few would agree with that claim, maybe it's most likely because Brakhage chose motion pictures as the medium for his eye massage. His pulsing body of nearly 400 films, ranging from Cézanne-like dream-rythms to frenetic image-memories and hand-painted films like *Palecek At 100 Miles Per Hour*, presents the viewer's eyes by feeding it imagery dislodged from meaning and context. While Brakhage found sound distracting and kept most of his movies silent, his pupil-drilling light poems

have a vibrating rhythm that all but begs for musical response.

One recent answer is Lee Ranaldo's Test Of Light, a rotating group of improvisers including William Hoekler, Alan Licht and Christian Marclay who assemble an ever-expanding live soundtrack to Brakhage's refracted ray study *Test Of Light* (1974). And tonight Ranaldo's main spouse Sonic Youth did the same to seven shorter Brakhage films at NYC's Anthology Film Archives, with proceeds defraying Brakhage's outstanding medical expenses. Anthology founder James Melas introduced the group by recounting Brakhage's response to a doctor who encouraged the film maker to mentally locate and destroy his cancer cells. "I found them, and I found them. But I couldn't find 'em," Brakhage said. "They were so beautiful."

That haunting sentiment rippled through Sonic Youth's performance, generating a wide

audience thought cell that slowly oozed both its wretches and creases. Shrouded against the screen like Socratic open shadows, the group—led by second drummer Tim Berman, who also participated in Test Of Light's recent European tour—began cautiously, stretching a tentative metronomic web that appeared to be intimidated by the towering imagery. But eventually they roared a coursing aerial map of the film's throbbing visual nerves. The speedy transition of falling percussion ruffles, spiral guitar shreds and muted amp roars pitched a musical text only a few campuses away from the haunted forest of the group's *Six Seasons End Of Sister*.

Their river of acids flowed upward from theirs, carrying a truce of peace. The group was neither reactive to *The Madder King* (1965), Brakhage's riotous document of the NYC's now demolished Third Avenue El train,

bathing the accelerating footage in a clocking, waxy drone. The second part of Brakhage's most famous epic, *Dog Star Man* (1960), provided a jagged response, as the film's rite-floping glenwaxers were bowed by a crowd expecting something like a greatest hits show. It wouldn't happen now. As the musical possibilities of All Tomorrow's Parties have expanded, so have the perspectives of their audience. An adventure playground for Wile makers, no less. □

On Location

ARCHPEL GENEVA VARIOUS VENUES

BY RAHMA KHADIM

Many music festivals are content to line up a string of names related to a given theme. Less common are events that yield fresh insights into current trends, juxtapose different genres or introduce newcomers alongside established artists. The Archipel Festival's 12th edition did all of that, pulling together composers and performers from automatic music and minimalism to improv and sound art in a demanding and innovative programme.

In the evenings devoted to musicians, for instance, the programmes turned their backs on big guns like Philip Glass and Steve Reich, focusing instead on four of its main indigenous practitioners—James Tenney, Tam Johnson, Phil Niblock and Alvin Lucier. Among the high points was one of Johnson's most exciting pieces, *The Chord Catalogue*, played by the composer himself. *The Chord Catalogue* requires the performer to play all the two-note chords in the octave, followed by all the three-note chords and so on up to 13—amounting to a grand total of 81,718 chords. The ghostly clouds of overtones arising down through Johnson's

performance transformed this inherently rational work into a transcendental experience.

Equally spellbinding were the two works by Alvin Lucier staged later the same evening. In the premiere of *Altered Now*, Lucier, virtuoso bassist, Chris Levine played long flute tones against waves of sound produced by oscillators, creating weird phantom beats. In the following, *Small Waves*, microphones inserted into six partially filled water containers triggered strands of feedback that sounded at frequencies determined by the size and shape of the vessels. Their acoustic properties were further modified by two performers playing the contents of one vessel into another. Meanwhile, a string quartet, a trombone and a pianist tuned to the feedback to create interference patterns. Together with the slow rhythmic movements of two lake water surfaces draped in black, the unearthly sounds issuing from the stage transformed the formal performance into a supernatural ceremony.

The acoustic music programme continued the work of François Bayle, former head of the Groupe de Recherches Musicales in Paris and a pillar of the electroacoustic establishment, with that of younger composers spanning across the GRM's orbit. Bayle presented a selection of

works spanning his lengthy career. Learning with rattles, squeaks and expressive gurgles, his expansive soundscapes can initially appear fuzzy, but given attention, every sound takes on a life and meaning of its own. The concert included his homage to Robert Wyatt called "K", resounding one of the most fascinating pieces from the early part of his career incorporating disconcertingly loud horns and buzzes, "it" was an unexpectedly savage deconstruction of a vocal improvisation by Wyatt. An enthralling rock fan, Bayle had captured this off the cuff performance during a Soft Machine show in Paris at the end of the 60s. The evening devoted to younger artists provided a rare opportunity to hear the work of three women composers—with hit and miss results. Mobile Boleszewski's heavy-handed treatments of a woman's voice in "Etoiles Akashika" bordered on the oppressive. By contrast, former Jarry Harbinson student, Natasha Barnett's finely detailed "Little Animals" worked a host of evocative animal-like sounds through some subtle transformations.

Archipel also devoted space to the expanding art of sound installation. Pieces by leading Berlin-based sound artist Robin Meier and newcomer Rüdiger Doehle provided perceptual

puzzles. In Meier's "SoundBites", crackles and buzzes emanating from small flower-like speakers embedded in a scene described objects, lines and waves as they moved from speaker to speaker like the seismic activity imprints as much as the subtle and intriguing "Visual Illusion" created by their movements. Doehle's "White Mites on Skin" consisted of 1000 or so plant-like speakers arranged in neat rows on a grassy slope in the outskirts of Geneva. Here, environmental sounds—birds chirping in a nearby wood, planes passing overhead, etc.—merged with the whooshes, whirs and impenetrable hums issuing from the speakers to smother effect.

It fell to Günter Müller, Iku Sugimoto and John Tilbury to take sound to its logical extreme: silence. Although this was their first time out as trio, they gave a masterly performance. Gradually, the enigmatic notes from Sugimoto's guitar found their place beside Tilbury's judiciously placed piano tones and Müller's muted electronics. And the ever deepening swaths of silence, the trio's sparse interjections hovered tantalizingly in the air, before receding back into silence. Like much else at Archipel, it was a riveting and intense experience. □

X-RAXT SCULPTURE MUSICAL: DIALOGUES BETWEEN MUSIC AND ART BERLIN PODEWIL

GERMANY
BY ED WARD

It sounded like a good idea. After all, the edges of both art and music have frequently found common ground, and are still doing so, so why not a chance to explore this a bit? And Podewil, Berlin's theoretical haven for the avant garde, is a great place to do it: a fine auditorium with good sound and plenty of small rooms in which to stick some installations.

Ever given that experimental music and art is just that—experimental—and that experiments can fail or not prove what was hoped for, this series was a disappointment. The installations gave a hint of what was to come: Kawaii's dull *One Million Years (Past And Future)* consisted of him reading numbers; Charlemagne Palestine's work of him twirling a cord with a light bulb on the end while it drops piece; Hildegard Weidenkam's *Sensory Garden*, a pleasant enough New Age soundscape; Ralf Langhert's rather cool *Kleines Klangspiel* (small sound game), which drops balls tied to a cord onto metal surfaces situated around the room at a more or less random fashion, and, in the foyer, Chaeli Wijnhoven and de Aetery's *An Act Of Intensity*, a dull video of some guys putting up whirrings on a salt flat. One out of five, I figured.

And, it must be admitted, the festival got off to a good start with David Bow and Max Eastley's *Site Forces*, in which the two played off each other. Top with various kites and small noseamplers, Eastley with a huge bow hooked up to some processors that made some impressive

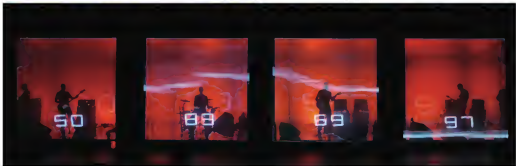
sounds, and, later, activating little wooden balls on fishing line which brushed against some sculptures on stage. The whole thing was quiet, and, after a while, involving, although in fairness it went on too long. This may have been due to the cancellation of John Will, who was scheduled to present two pieces. The evening's closest, *Net Of Light*, was bound by the length of the film of the same name, by the late Stan Brakhage, with which they improvised. *Net Of Light*, the group, is a bit of a supergroup, with Leo Rausch and Alvin Lucier on drums, Olé Olé on turntables and Tim Barnes on guitar, joined by Ulrich Krieger on what appeared to be some people's dream instrument, a free jazz tenor sax that made no sound at all. The film, from 1974, was purely abstract and mostly dark. The group made a point of not interacting with it, which was fine, I suppose, but after 45 minutes, it seemed to me that neither the film nor the group was going anywhere, but I could, and did.

Thursday was billed as "The Long Night Of X-Raxt", and boy was it ever. I missed the opening speeches by Petr Kotik and Charlemagne Palestine, remembering the latter's from the first evening, which mostly consisted of him whining about history and then jumping up and down rhythmically and chanting "Take advantage of now!" But long nights should at least start on time, and the audience was clustered around the auditorium door for over half an hour before we were allowed in. First up was Joseph Kubera, from Kotik's SEM Ensemble, playing *Solo Lives*, eight pieces for accordion and piano by Alvin Lucier from 1986, but heckering bad for a much earlier era. Despite titles like "Lamp Shade" and "Barbecue Quid", they were pretty much indistinguishable from each other, very

slow, with occasional fissures of beats when the sitarwires and the piano notes met. Then, the rest of the ensemble came out for Marcel Duchamp's *The Bride Stripped Bare By Her Bachelors, Ever*. *Enstat Musical*, a 1974 realisation by Kotik, but of what I have no idea. *Enstat Musical* was a game Duchamp made up where very short musical events were written on cards, which were dealt out to his sisters, who performed what they got. Kotik's *Solo* was a long, tedious, painful thing that recalled the worst of academic composition. This segment of the long night, though, ended with a resounding success: Duchamp's *Sculpture Musicale*, from 1913, in which a number of musical toys, grisly jewellery boxes, stuffed animals and the like were all wound up and placed, unlinked, on a table and allowed to go until they ran down. Someone in the back of the hall let off three blasts on an air-horn. This was Duchamp, for sure. Too bad I got lost about five minutes after the break. Charlemagne Palestine treated us to "homocubical", a dome created from several CDs, while a photo of a couple of stuffed animals blinked on the wall. Then Kotik came back with John Cage's *Ready*, which, with its breathy flute and tremolo tones, sounded like nothing more than old Japanese music. Another break, and then on came Porter Ricks. Ricks' *Beastless* rishing sounds interspersed with glishes, boring black and white video, we were over four hours in and my backside was tired, so I left, missing the last half of Porter Ricks, not to mention SEM's interpretation of a La Monte Young piece.

After that I was with a great group of friends that I pulled myself back on the Saturday for a show that was going to feature one of my least favourite presences on the 'avant garde' scene, DJ Spooky. The program opened with the worst act so far, Oso Ectico, from Portugal, consisting of a man and a woman playing harmonium and a third guy sitting at a desk controlling a recording of footages walking back and forth. The audience really got into this, providing their own footpads as they walked out in droves. But then came Reinhold Fried with a neo-Bethoven, a 1929 electric grand piano on which he delivered scintillating versions of Henry Cowell's *The Banshee* and Arlenian Hahn, as well as a lovely improvisation of his own which used feedback to great effect. I could care that his banshee didn't scream like the composer's recording I remember from childhood, but I really enjoyed it. And then, dammit, Spooky saved the day. His performance was announced as a Duchamp remix, and it was. He took the idea of the *Enstat Musical*, applied it to both visuals on his laptop which were projected behind him and to his handling of various musical elements and excerpts from Duchamp's 1957 lecture "The Creative Act", and ended his show (intentionally speaking) for nearly an hour the last, the manipulation and the visuals brought together the stated theme of the concert: songs in a way no one else had done, and as a result I promise to give DJ Spooky a whole lot more slack the next time I'm in his audience.

I'll continue to eat Podewil's salt, too. The poor success-failure ratio of this series was unusual, although I would urge the ones crew to go to a rock festival soon and check out how soundchecks are done earlier in the day and equipment is placed so that it's easily changed. I don't know to do the series—I know it'll be coming up—that has as many hits as this has misses. □



Wise on the stage sets for their performances of *Pink Flamingo* (top right) and *Saved* (bottom). Top left: interval noise with Jake & Dinco Chapman and Project Dark

WIRE: FLAG: BURNING
LONDON BARBICAN

BY LAURE BLANDIN

For this appearance at the Barbican, Wire were obliged to come up with something more than just a gig to fulfil the Only Connect festival's strapline promise of "a series of extraordinary events". Both

as individuals and in various collaborations, the group's members are no strangers to mixed media work, but a few notorious nights notwithstanding — like the pair of performance art augmented performances in 1979-80 that spawned the *Document And Eyewitness* album — they have mostly played it relatively straight when they have gone out as Wire. Not untypically their chosen collaborators had no previous experiential working with rock groups: theatre, film and opera designer Es Devlin, and artist brothers Jake and Dinos Chapman.

The concert programmed back-to-back performances of their 1977 debut, *Pink Flag*, and their latest album, *Send*, separated by an interval in which the Chapman brothers and Nisreen Reynolds of Project Dark effected a 20-minute live remix of Wine tracks. The albums

themselves might be 25 years apart, but critics have been likening the superbly drilled rock of *Sand* to *Pink Flag*, at least in terms of their shared intensity and concentrated rock clout. To justify that *Only Connect* tag, their *Pink Flag* and *Sand* stage sets were designed by the Chapman brothers and Ed Davlin, respectively.

Pink Flag The girl bear some of 1977's punk ballads but in this 2003 performance it sounded surprisingly contemporary. Maybe it's the way they played it. Guitarist Bruce Gilbert has said that rehearsing the songs of Pink Flag was like PE. And on the album, Wire do indeed sound like they're just about leaping up. With age comes proficiency, however. Where many of their punk contemporaries mellowed, burnt out or faded away, Wire now play Pink Flag songs with more bite and, if anything, more speed than before. At *The Barbican*, "Sugoon's Gift" clocked in at about 45 seconds, showing a good 15 seconds from the group's nervous personal best.

Although Pink Flag was heavily cited on its 1977 release, Wire's onerous commitment to putting an album behind them as soon as it was released means it never became a milestone around their neck. Returning to it in 2003, then,

they lay too great need either to demystify it or lay it to rest instead. We cranked up to irreverently abusive and abundant quackery. Talking of Pk's, the Chapman brothers must have been listening in when Gillen dropped that quote, for they took as their cue for Punk Pig's stage set which consisted of projecting videos through most of Wink's Pink Pig performance of keep-it-junkies running hysterically into the camera as they ran through their synchronized stop-aerobics routines. Some felt the joke soon wore thin, but the sheer monotony of the visual theatre was half the point. Once the clips started appearing as the set progressed, however, the Chapmans' effort started to look a little halfhearted. For all its stoofness, Punk Pig is also chockful of topical humor, and the way Newman stopped "Broil" dead with "[w]ithin [the] bright light [there] might be a shadow," ("BROIL") croaked me up.

Once Ware had played the album through, original pauses and all, a group of pink-tracksuited men and women joined the group for the first set finale, exercising along to a new version of Pink Flag's title track.

performance of *Sond* was a visually stunning construction, quite unlike anything seen before on a rock stage. When the lights came up, each Wire member was sealed into their own room: a steel box, erected side by side. These were individually lit, with images back-projected on a muslin screen walling the four hatches. Starting with muted lighting and a propertied ballline, signs of musical ecstacy were registered in dramatic close-up readouts and heart rate data over projections of dancing sperm and brain cells. In line with the biological theme, 'Newman's room' was later decorated with an anatomical diagram of the human brain. The show signposted to his live material, while eyes and other facial details were projected on to the other members' units. Deakin's vision was a perfect match for *Sond*'s clausophobia, visceral music, which Wire played with fearless intensity.

Send Iwa highlighted the differences between Wire then and now in contrast to Pink Flag's 21 terse, angular caroms. Send's songs accumulate intensity through repetition over time. Their short, sharp set concluded with Wire one by one unfastening the back wall fabric of their cells and walking away. □

On Location

FREEDOM OF THE CITY 2003 LONDON CONWAY HALL

BY BRIAN MARLEY

Freedom of the City is an annual showcase for improvisers and performers of radical music. Though most participants are UK based, there's always a strong international contingent. This year a list to bring greater cohesion to the program, the festival has shrunk slightly, so concerts played during three afternoons/evening sessions. What's interesting about Freedom Of The City is that analyses of the performances by musicians and audiences alike are often ferociously detailed, and what's causing consternation this year is reductionism. Interviewed in the *Wre 251*, Eddie Prevost damned the tendency of reductionism, thinking audiences know it in "a rather facile, doomy nihilism"; but here it is, as a member of Martin's group Sakota, comfortably playing alongside Mark Wastell, the key figure in the hometown brand of reductionism that a New London Silence. Go figure.

I suspect that Martin really couldn't care less about musical definitions, and Sakota's music seems calculated to thwart expectations rather than bolster them. Mutter (computer feedback), Prevost (percussion) and Wastell (amplified tentacles) are joined by Rhodi Davis (bass) and Margarita Garcia (electric double bass). Out-and-thrust call and response is acutely absent, and technique is refined. The careful selection and placement of sounds in the music is what matter most. Some events occur simultaneously, or overlap, and in the process the music thickens and there and acoustics complexity. Within a few minutes, the players are all using bow to draw sounds from their instruments. Martin bowing his laptop's screen casing. After 30 minutes of tense, tense, slow moving music, the piece appears to have reached a natural conclusion, and the players freeze in mute tableau. A long alone silence. Does this sound a busy leap from the strings of his harp, like a slow exhalation of breath, and the group embarks on the first of several brief, narrative codes.

The festival's most anticipated event is the performance by pianist John Tibury and toilet-pot guitarist Keith Rowe. Despite their long relationship in AMM, until recently they had never played in duo. And their first duo performance is set to happen tonight. How disappointing, then, that they invite AMM colleague Eddie Prevost to sit in with them. Of course, it's a committed and satisfying performance. AMM concerts almost invariably last 90 minutes. But two things mark this one out: it's heavily — it ends after roughly 30 minutes, the point at which AMM are usually just getting into their stride — and the concentrated energy that AMM unleash: Tibury's pounding, jarring, dissonant chords, with which the set begins, bring the music instantly alive to all manner of possibilities, and the duo successfully pursue a number of them within the limited timespan. In the last few minutes, as if to honour the original intention, Prevost stops playing and sits back, eyes closed, evidently enjoying the interplay between Rowe and Tibury.

For the closing set, Prevost leaves his barrel drum, resounding snare, gong and hand-held

cymbals on the main stage and moves to a small podium where a regular drum kit has been set up. This change of tools signals a shift in emphasis. As their acronym suggests, the FJQ are a free jazz quartet, the other members being Harrison Smith (saxophones, bass clarinet), Paul Rutherford (trombone), and standing in for an indulged Roy Moore, Maria Martins (cello). FJQ's only album *Promotions* (1989), still accurately represents the group's music. Afterwards, someone described the set as "the history lesson". FJQ's free jazz doesn't stem directly from the black music tradition of Albert Ayler and John Coltrane. Exoticist blonches are avoided, as is any detraction between the frontline instruments and the rhythm section. This is a music played by equals. Each of their four pieces is lean and snappy, with tightly woven counterpoint from Smith and Rutherford. But, inexplicably, for much of the set, the music falls to quiffs.

Free citizens (clockwise from top left): John Tibury, Rhodi Davis, Margarita Garcia, Martin (with laptop) and Mark Wastell

FREEDOM OF THE CITY: LONDON IMPROVISERS ORCHESTRA LONDON CONWAY HALL

BY RICHARD WOLFSON

The London Improvisers Orchestra took over Holborn's Conway Hall on the hottest day of the year for one of their periodic attempts at resoling the contradiction that is a concert. Inspired by veteran musician Beth Moon, conclusion is a corollary of conducting and improvisation where a composer/conductor figure directs an ensemble of improvisers with written instructions, hand movements — anything except an actual notated score. Regard less, something combustible must surely happen in an event bringing together the likes of saxophonist Lou Costello, drummer Louis Mohino and pianist Verge

Weste; anarchic performance oriented participants like composer and saxophonist Caroline Knäuper and mayhem maker Steve Benedict, and the X factors of Keith Rowe and Pat Thomas on guitars and electronics.

Opening proceedings, Pat Thomas set up a failing post-hip-hop rock, with three drummers and three double bassists clambering all over each other, while huge, howling and swirling noises erupted from the massed ranks of horns and strings. Caroline Knäuper introduced Dutch vocalist Jack Blank, who preoccupied an amazing call and response passage where small instrumental units within The LO's ranks imitated Blank's whoops and shouts. Roderick Ramanian hit upon the perfect way to close the first half by co-opting musicians from the stage one at a time to leave Lou Costello all alone with his soprano sax. After three minutes of exquisite soloing, he

finally muttered, "Can I go now, please?"

In contrast with the chopping and changing textures that characterized many of the introductions, Kurt Aulermann took a different conceptual approach by setting in train a swelling tidal mass that underpinfully grew into a giant crescendo. Over the duration, however, the orchestra's tendency to produce similar textures and sonorities in response to various emotions exposed the potential flaw at the heart of the conductor process: hand gestures are a frustratingly imprecise way of controlling large ensemble improvisations. One gesture might use a blast from the horn section; another might send the voices and cells into an organic whirr, and yet another could set off drums or pianos... and then what? Escaping from conductor's rather too predictable formulas wasn't proving so easy, but Steve

Benedict had a good try by directing a counterintuitive guitar concerto from Keith Rowe. Well, none of an anti-concerto really. Rowe's low frequency drones and elongated textures challenged the orchestra to come up with something different. Escaping those preset control over the orchestra's music. One Jack and Philip Blackman singled out small, light units to extract some extremely subtle sonorities.

But do musicians really respond well to someone pointing at them and instructing them to make a sound? The one passage where the orchestra got to improvise with no directions to guide them was interesting precisely because every now and then something unique and magical emerged out of their chaos/jamming. By definition, any attempt at directing such spontaneous flowings would have automatically destroyed them. □

GODSPEED YOU! BLACK EMPEROR + JACKIE O MOTHERFUCKER QUEBEC ST ROCH CHURCH/MONTREAL RIALTO THEATER

BY BRIAN COLEY

The vibes couldn't have been weirder in the midst of the Second Bush War, there was something very disconcerting about sitting in a vast, drafty church in Quebec City's old quarter, watching local parishioners try to figure out what they should be complaining to about the hordes of hairy musicians clambering around setting things up. This small group of tight-assed things approached just about everyone mulling around the back of the church in hope of finding someone who would take responsibility for this mess. But neither the Godspeed nor Black Emperor nor the Jackie O Motherfucker organizers are interested, so the poor bastards ended up leaving without even being able to yell at anyone. Too bad for them. They should have stayed. I mean, they'd

gotten in free already, right?

Right. The same could not be said of Jackie O's founder, Iain Greenwood, who had been deported back across the border into the US two days before on the strength of his juvenile arrest record. Rumor had it this was a Canadian lit-fab list response to local cops and the FBI deterring Godspeed for questioning in Orleans for looking "suspicious" while releasing the tour van. It's a great time to be alive, eh?

Well, 1300 people thought so in Quebec City. The church was packed with a crowd that might be best described, sartorially, as "folkies" and the girls who love them. And they were pretty well pleased with Jackie O, who substituted Puffy Enkano's sex for the usually Greenwood's guitar. But all new line-up, including Sainna from Hall Of Fame, produced a line of gorgeous drone elements that shivered through the church's bigness like a silver cord of war.

In contrast, Godspeed tonight sounded extremely hard-edged and Pugged. The tunes were played at a fairly slow pace, and the effects,

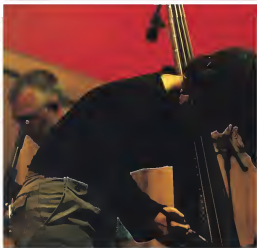
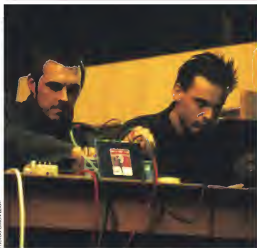
flourishes and weird dynamics combined to create something not unlike Red-a-xi Crisman, as the way the music expanded in several unexpected dimensions. Personally, it struck me as a little overly rockist, especially in light of Godspeed's viciously anti-formal roots, but the music combining with their projections and the strange ambience of the space was pretty pleasant. Which was pleasant, however was the ambience of Montreal's Rialto the next night. Unlike the church, this place had a bar (which was good) and condoned smoking (which was great). Recently renovated, the Rialto reminded me of a somewhat better preserved version of the rock venues of my youth. The setting and a far more post-punk crowd made the Montreal night very different.

Although they produced some moments of pure joy, Jackie O's anti-rock procedural stance was somewhat at odds with the place. Their "grooves" are as atonal, their approach as antithetical, but their results are always a little vibrant. In Montreal they only coaxed in short bursts, but everyone was so deep into their beats and clips that they didn't seem to mind.

Godspeed, however, were brilliant, better than I could have imagined. Though they hate playing their home town, both the projections really worked with the music and the group were fully jacked. They played twice as fast, twice as loud as they had in Quebec City, ramping things up to a headbanger intensity that really sounded amazing.

At this speed and intensity, the way their songs combined with the visuals was a slowly animate collage about the politics of revenge and the violence of the human spirit — was incredibly powerful. And when the two groups joined forces for an end and peace, as they did on both nights, some kind of inexplicable post-core hippy gas was released that just made everyone smile. Even the creepy looking roadie industry guys, who were lurking around obviously hoping to make some score prob for something. In the event they were as incapable of cracking the code of beauty behind this North American underground summit, as those lost churchgoers back in Quebec City.

Here's a clue. Horizontal action. I guess that's what it's all about. Always. □



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THURSDAY / MAY 29th: BBCI Collective Session 3: Memphis Industries feat.

The BBC's new music and culture website presents the latest in the series of low fi acoustic sessions from the UK's finest new talent. **J. XAVIERRE, BLUE STATES, GO TEAM (DJ Set) FREE** for subscribers to www.bbc.co.uk/collective

FRIDAY / JUNE 13th: SPEAK EASY

Unlucky night... in association with 'MILK and BEEP' magazine DJ CHU-I hosts a full list combination of microphone poetry and lyrical outbursts, rare soul grooves and Hip-Hop. **KEVINSTRUMENTAL** joins forces with **PURRO** and **DAN DIEGO** for a bout of hardcore three deck action. European and continental breaks and loops to mould your mood. Prohibition was never this fun. Terrace Bar: 8-2AM £5



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PRSF has successfully supported a diverse range of pioneering artists under the scheme, including **Bahd**, **Normal Position**, **Scanner**, **RUE** (Jamie Hombre), **Tierman P Kelly**, **Project Dark**, **Stoloff & Hopkinson** and **Phil Ogg**, with events ranging from live **PiAs** at club nights to installations incorporating specially commissioned films and performances by string quartets.

Amounts up to and including £2,500 available. Deadline for applications: Thursday 14th August 2003. For more details and to get an application form, please visit www.prsf.co.uk or call: Brick Lane on 020 7305 4044.



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LEE 'SCRATCH' PERRY AND

MAD PROFESSOR PLUS

LEE 'SCRATCH' PERRY VS COLDCUT: AUDIOVISUAL CLASH AND THE BEES

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SLY & ROBBIE AND MICHAEL ROSE SUPPORT: LIVE SET FROM HOWIE B
FRI 13 JUNE RFH 8PM

THE SONGS OF BOB MARLEY & LEE 'SCRATCH' PERRY FEAT.

SKIN, MICHAEL ROSE, SLY & ROBBIE, NEVILLE STAPLE,

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SAT 14 JUNE RFH 8PM

DUB POETRY EXPLOSION: MUTABARUKA, JAYZIK AND MORE

SUN 15 JUNE QEH 7.45PM

TRICKY PLUS SPECIAL GUEST LEE 'SCRATCH' PERRY AND

MAD PROFESSOR

MON 16 JUNE RFH 7.30PM

MICHAEL FRANTI AND SPEARHEAD & SUN RA ARKESTRA &

DJ SPOOKY

FRI 20 JUNE RFH 8PM

LINTON KWESI JOHNSON AND THE DENNIS BOVELL DUB BAND

SAT 21 JUNE QEH 7.45PM

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MON 23 JUNE RFH 7.30PM TICKETS LIMITED TO 4 PER PERSON

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TUE 24 JUNE QEH 7.45PM

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THU 26 JUNE QEH 8PM

MACY GRAY & LEE 'SCRATCH' PERRY

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Plus free screenings of Lee 'Scratch' Perry films, mixing workshops, special DJ sets,
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LEE
'SCRATCH'
PERRY'S

Meltdown 03



Photograph: Dave Hume

www.rfh.org.uk/meltdown

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VINICIUS CANTUARIA
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info: www.femaleavantgarde.org / www.beneficialoperation.org / www.theothersexfestival.cz / Tel.: +420 61 222 950



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matt davis: trumpet, electronics
rhodri davis: harp
mark wastell: amplified textures
info: tunami@xg.ne.jp

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CARLINHOS BROWN [BRA]
THE CARDIGANS [S]
DARREN EMERSON [UK]
GANG STARR [US]
BETH GIBBONS & RUSTIN MAN [UK]
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KASHMIR [DK]
SALIF KEITA [MALI]
LARS H.U.G. [DK]
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MATERIAL FEAT. BILL LASWELL & GIGI [INT]

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BONCO MARTIN [SA]
BRENDAN BENSON [US]
CATO SALSA EXPERIENCE [N]
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CHICKS ON SPEED [D/US]
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GANIA [MALI]
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GANIA feat.
BILL LASWELL (MAR/US)
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NICKA [DK]
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KIMMO POHOJONEN
KLUSTER [FIN]
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& BILL LASWELL [UK/US]
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Out There

This month's selected festivals, live events, clubs and broadcasts.

Send info to **The Wire**, 2nd Floor East, 88-94 Wentworth Street, London E1 7SA, UK

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Compiled by Phil England



Lee 'Scratch' Perry curates this year's Meltdown festival

UK festivals

AFRICA OYE

LIVERPOOL & MANCHESTER
Europe's largest free African music festival features artists from across the entire continent from South Africa to Senegal, DR Congo to Angola. Featured artists include Kanda Bongo Man, Papa & Cheik, Moesaa Kouyate, Planetes D'eglance, Ganga Basso Band, Aja, Socho and more. Liverpool and Manchester venues, 13-22 June. www.africaye.com

THE FIRST INTERNATIONAL

CAMBRIDGE FESTIVAL OF LOOPING
Featuring Rick Walker's loop pool, Theo Travis, Darkroom, Cos Chapman, Peter Gregory and Peter Dinklage. Cambridge Michael House Cafe, 21 June, 8pm. www.cambridge-looping.org.uk, www.collective.co.uk

CYBERSONICA

LONDON
Three day festival of music, art, sound and technology featuring live performances as well as exhibitions, screenings and talks. Concerts include Burnt Friedman and Fennec (19 June), Michael Anyane, Si (on)ja and Ins Gamble all with films in the theatre plus Not Clickable and Lakut in the bar. Wed 600, DJ /rupture, The Bug and support (20), Awake, Ulrich Schrauss and Dis Creeds and Medium in the theatre and Nones, Nala live, Arose and Default: Dis in the bar (21), Howe B and Si Begg, Addictive TV Kix plus Nick Lomax and Play Label Dis in the bar (22). London ICA, 19-21 June. www.ica.org.uk

HOT SHIT

LONDON
More 'kore rock' 'n' roll from the Sonic Mooc helix in celebration of the release of their third compilation album *Re: SHIT*. 111, Port Diving, Chorus Hoof, Martin Harry Riffes, Bold and DJ Jo Perfect (12 June, 7pm-midnight); Pink Goggles,

Mommy & Daddy, Kings Have Long Arms, Bana Overford plus Dis Queens of Noise (13, 7pm-12am); Sasse Errata, Ex Models, Klang, Crook Village and Ed Lake plus Dis Richard Fearless, Sean Mook Modesty, Disastropher and many others. London EGG, 12-14 June. 08700 600100, www.wayahead.com

LEE 'SCRATCH' PERRY'S MELTDOWN LONDON

Jamaica's living dub legend is the honored curator of this year's Meltdown concert series. Alpha Blonky and Kingpin (8 June), Public Enemy and DJ Lord Aweel (10), Tashie mixed by Lee 'Scratch' Perry and Mad Professor (11), Sly & Robbie with Michael Rose plus Howe B (13), Jamaican Dance Day (14), The Songs Of Bob Marley And Lee 'Scratch' Perry featuring Michael Rose, Sly & Robbie with guest vocalists Lee Perry, Sly, Neville Staples and Rankin' Roger (14), Dub Poetry Explosion with Mutabenski (15), Thick with Lee 'Scratch' Perry plus Mad Professor (16), Michael Rents and Spearhead, Sun Ra Asteria and DJ Spooky (20), Limon Kaves Johnson and The Dennis Bovell Dub Band (21), Run Lovin' Criminals and Statuade Horbore (23), Love's Rock evening with Susan Cadogan, Akiba and Sister Audrey (24), David Holmne's Fire Association (26), Macy Gray with Lee 'Scratch' Perry (27) and Asian Dub Foundation and Qumari (30). London South Bank Centre, 8-30 June, 020 7060 4242, www.rh.org.uk/meltdown

TOTAL WRITING

LONDON
Canter People's Theatre's first festival of experimental poetry spoken word and textual performance. Music features as part of the programme. Imbrosset, Sea Band with sound artist Philip Henderson and poet Karlien Van Den Beukel with instrumentalists Peter McManana and Michael Breach (27 June), AMM pianist John

Tillyard in conversation with Harry Glinis; Roger Smith with poet Elizabeth James plus Susanne Famer and Ins Gamble (28), an extended reading by Genetide Moss, music by Ollis NI and Beard Bates, and a closing event featuring Saxon Ming and The Bohmen Brothers (29). London Canader People's Theatre, 27-29 June, 020 7916 5878, www.cpt-direct.co.uk

International festivals

ALL TOMORROW'S PARTIES LOS ANGELES

USA
Simpsons creator Matt Groening curates this year's event which features Boredoms, Breeders, Nick Cave & The Bad Seeds, Coldcut, The Fall, Le Tigre, Jan Wobble, The Magic Band, Melt Banana, Daniel Johnston, Shannon Wright, Toddmanbug, Family Slide Show Players, The Coup, Wino, Yo La Tengo, The Melvins and others. Hollywood and the Palace, The Henry Fonda Theatre and the Palladium, 20-22 June, \$100, www.alltomorrows.com

ATERFORUM FESTIVAL ITALY

The rich musical heritage of the Mediterranean is the focus of the 17th edition of this festival featuring Anwar Bohrem from Tunisia (6 June), Palestine Sefaria from Crete (7), Kamila Jahan from Palestine and Rahi Ayyagil Ensemble from Turkey (8), Françoise Alari from France (13), Loffi Bashirou from Tunisia (14) and Maurice el Medoui and Sahraoui from Algeria (15). Female venues venues, 6-15 June, 09 39 532 21831, www.aterforum.it/aterforum

BAD BOHN KILBI

SWITZERLAND
The line-up includes Fu Manchu, Stillier Has,

Engelmele and Poshop (12 June), Dälek vs Feust, Vladimir Delic, Velma, L'enfance Rouge, DJ /rupture and Donna Summer (13), Surt, Kante, Luomo, Jan Jehnek, Barbara Morgenstern and Schneider IM (14), Dödingen TonVerein, 12-14 June, 00 41 26 493 1115, www.bahdm.ch

DRUGA GODBA (THAT OTHER MUSIC) SLOVENIA

10th annual international festival featuring The Whirling Dervishes Of Derontas, Sheikh Hamez Shkaur & Ensemble Al-Kandi (25), Ned Rotherberg and Samir & Miriam Jacobson (26), David Evans (27), Tanakoff and Sam Mangwana (28), Katalina and Natacha Atlas (31), Hanna El Bechara, Mercedes Peon and Garmarna (31) and Spawees Inc featuring Ken Vandermark, Nate McBride and Hamid Drake (1 June). Ljubljana various venues, 25 May-1 June, 00 386 1 430 82 60, www.drugagodba.si

DOEK FESTIVAL THE NETHERLANDS

Weekend festival of improvised music comprising two evening concerts and a free Sunday afternoon recording session of ad hoc combinations of the various musicians. The evening concerts feature the Marjorie ten Hove String Quartet, Janine (Wilbert de Jode and Peter Böttrmann), Boerndt (Cor Fuhler, Gius Jansen, Michael Kolchov, Eric Boeren, Gert Marshall) (6 June) and Tobias Dullius Abet, Cor Fuhler and Keith Rowe, Wollo's World (7). Amsterdam Bimhuis, 6-7 June, 00 31 20 423 720, www.doek.org

FEZ FESTIVAL OF WORLD SACRED MUSIC MOROCCO

Festival artists include Doudou N'diaye Rose, Ferda Mohamed Ali at Ensemble Magan, Gorge Bruey, Gilberto Gil, Kungchen Lhamo, Iyay Mailey, Julia Mayeux, Madhat Mugal, Mohamed Reza Shajarian, Ihsane RMIK, the



Suicide on The Wire's stage at Roskilde Festival this year

Animated Jackson Sittler and more. There is also a panels, film screenings and a photographic exhibition. For various venues, 6-14 June, www.festivalvlog.org

GNAGUA AND WORLD MUSIC FESTIVAL MOROCCO

Annual gathering of the Gnauva brotherhood of Moroccan healers and invited guests from around the world. Invites come from Cuba, Rajasthan, Tunisia, Vietnam, Norway, Algeria, France, USA, Senegal and Italy. Both a festival and a forum for the musical exchange and dialogue. Essaouira, 26-29 June, free, 212 2236 3417, www.festival-gnauva.co.ma

MIMI FESTIVAL FRANCE

18th edition of this annual avant garde festival featuring Z'ev, DJ Vekim And Russian Percussion, David Watson, Leo Rando, Tony Buck, Pierre-Yves Maes, Caspar Brötzmann and others. Supported by The Wire. Manifesto various venues, 24-27 July, tel 00 33 04 9504 9550, www.mimifest.fr

MUSIQUES INNOVATIVES FRANCE

International festival of improvised and experimental music now in its 14th year. Performers include Erik M. Hugh Davies, Chris Carter, Tabu Akyama, Jérôme Noetinger, John Russell, Jean-François Paavola, Kapotte Muziek, Rael Meekap, Noël Akchafé. Saint-Etienne various venues, 5-16 June, emtozoo.free.fr

THE OTHER SEX CZECH REPUBLIC

Female electronic music/multimedia festival featuring Marica, Kato Andriev, Fala Padure, Babo La Kucha-Ale, Kofe Moshov and Neotropic. The day also comprises an exhibition, films, stalls and workshops. Prague Abaton, 14 June, www.femaleeventygarde.org

ROSKILDE FESTIVAL DENMARK

The Wire has teamed up with Northern Europe's largest outdoor festival to take over a stage for one evening only. 27 June sees The Wire. *Adventures In Modern Music* featuring a line-up of digital dysfunction from Squapepusher, jittery electronics from Suicide, Fashibusha's psychedelic blowout and wordy neopunk from Mile Ludd. New York's I-Sound will be on the decks. Other acts streaming to this annual Danish bash include Asian Dub Foundation, Beth Gibbons & Rustin Man, BSA, Bonnie Prince Billy, Chicks On Speed, G-R Gang Star, Daniel Johnston, The Kills, Massacre, Massive Attack, Metallica, Mr. Lif, Kimono Marjones, RJD2, Radoxon feat Jah Wobble & Bill Laswell, Salvatore, Sigur Rós, Toy Allen, Yo La Tengo and much more. 26-29 June, further information at www.roskildefestival.dk

SONAR SPAIN

BARCELONA's annual electronics fest is ten years old this year. The impressive line-up includes Björk, Underworld, Matthew Herbert, Big Bend, David Guetta, Hellfish, Jamie Lidell, Jeff Mills, DJ Hed, Soft Pink Truth, Prefuse 73, Richie Hawtin, Beaver Jaccson, Pete, Alpha Twin and label showcases from Antipop (Jai, Doornie, Sele, Sage Francis), Smalltown Supersound (Jazzkammer, Si Duperman, Kim Hooray, Jaga Jazzot), Meigs (Tijljo Nanku, Rita & Tina Frank), Cheap (Pierik Pulinger), Mute (Kompuls, Mountaintains, Pole, Appaksee), Song (Nobis, Toshi), Teils (Kaptain Kalliber, Bjorn Toske, Uzi Fontaine, Datarock), Mutek (Akalen, Vincent Lemaux, Deadcat) and many more. There will be a special retrospective of the festival in the form of an exhibition, as well as outdoor talks, press conferences and films. Barcelona CGR, Musicque and Auditor, 12-14 June, 00 34 902 150 025, www.sonar.es

Special Events

AETHER FEST

USA > WORLD

A month-long celebration of radio art featuring newly commissioned works and classics, broadcast and Webcast on New Mexico's KUNM throughout the month of June. The full schedule will be posted on the station's Website. Albuquerque KUNM 89.9 FM, 001 505 234 9483, www.aetherfest.com, www.kunm.org

AIR GUITAR CHAMPIONSHIP UK

Onestonair presents the fourth annual championship in the art of the air guitar. London On The Rocks, 26 June, 8pm-midnight, www.airguitar.com

EARJOB

UK

A four-day event comprising installations and live performances by BA and MA Sonic Arts disciplines featuring circuit bending, string pulling, steel winking, art and ecology and more. London, Hestery Gallery, 6-9 June, free, more info 020 7738 7099, cagobd@hotmail.com

FILE UNDER SACRED MUSIC UK

London premier screening of the film by Iain Forsyth and Jane Pollard – a remake of the infamous bootleg video of The Cramps performing at Nape Mortal Institute. Live performances include The Parkinsons and Holy Gairghy plus live music from Banned, London ICA, 13 June, 7pm, London ICA E8-E7, 020 7930 3647, www.fileundermusic.com

MERZ NITE MOVES UPTOWN UK

Polhuis and aesthetica conference put together by Wire writer Ben Watson, followed by an evening of free improvisation. Postcard pages will be presented by Watson, Esther Leslie, Keaton

Sethend, Stu Cohen and random Zippocologists – phone 020 7388 8579 for details. There's environmental improvisation from musicians on the Cowdville Road NW1 at 4pm prior to the evening concert which includes performances from the Norwegian duo Ivar Gydstrand & Inger Zach, saxophonists Lal Coxhill and Karl Mellor, singer Maggie Nails, trombonists Gail Brand and Ian McLachlan, THE Drenchling on detaphone, Manchester's Sonic Pleasures on incies plus assorted "bangers-in" London Theatre Technia, 2 June, 7pm evening concert, £3, 020 7387 6617, www.siamplan.co.uk, www.milinterference.co.uk

OUTLAND

Site-specific community event, exploring the role of Portland produced by Bristol based sound and vision artist Arctic. Dorset Royal Manor Theatre, 14 June, 01305 860792

THE PLASTIC PULSE: VISIONARY AMERICAN FILM AUSTRALIA

Rare showings of key works in American underground cinema including Stan Brakhage, Michael Snow, Jack Smith, Ian Cohen, Phil Niblock, Maya Dorn, Sidney Peterson, Ken Jacobs, Bruce Baillie, Marie Menken and Jackie O Necker's *The Angel*. The evening devoted to the work of composer/film maker Phil Niblock includes a performance of his *Quarzo*, *For Four* led by Oren Ambarchi, a screening of his *Sun Ra* tribute film *The Magic City*, his structuralist films and rare interview footage (11 June), Adelaide Memory Cinema, 28 May, 11, 18 & 25 June, 00 61 8 8410 0979, www.nao.org.au/cinemahedge

RESONANCE 104.4 FM

UK > THE WORLD
London Musicians' Collective's access radio station enters its second year of broadcasting with a variety of new shows as part of a

Out There

schedule overall. See Website for full listings. Ongoing records include the weekly *Clear Spot*, *The Wire's Adventures in Modern Music*; Cultural Co-operators' *London Diaspora*; and Billy Jennings's *One Way Single Parent Family Favourites*. Broadcasts across Central London noon-1am, seven days a week with repeats broadcast outside these times. Web streaming and full listings at www.resonancefm.com

SONIC RECYCLER

An afternoon evening of live electronic and digi programmed by the Spawel club in aid of Brainfart Recycling Action Group (BRAG). Performances by Scanner, Simon Fisher Turner, Ikenes and Ikenes are complemented by DJ sets from Philip Taggart (BBC Radio 3's *Mixing It* producer), Magz Hall, Motion, Bifloric and Nick Lascombe. The event also includes a showing of the short films *The Nuclear Ink*, a gallery environment designed by Iva Gerrells and information on the latest local recycling initiative. London Watermans, 7 June, 4-7pm (free at the bar), 7-11pm (£8/£6 in the theatre); 020 8232 1010, www.watermans.org.uk

SONIC ARTS NETWORK CONFERENCE

Annual electroacoustic music forum for SAN members and others. Paper presentations, panel discussions and informal meetings alongside multi-speaker diffusions of the latest prize winning works. Sheffield The Drama Studio, 30 May-1 June, www.sonicartsnetwork.org.uk. The event is preceded by Sound Junction II, which presents new works from University of Sheffield Sound Studio and beyond including newly commissioned Works For Phases. Sheffield Drama Studio, 28-29 May, 7:30pm, £3/£1 (incl), 0114 222 0486, www.wheel.ac.uk/assay/soundjunction

On stage

ACID MOTHERS TEMPLE SOUL COLLECTIVE

Members of Tokyo's psych-rock family on tour as

Tsuarbura and Peridra plus Maikoto Kawabata solo. Manchester Times (23 May), Leeds Adelphi (28), Newcastle Upon Tyne Clary (26), Glasgow Nice N Sleazy (27), Belfast Aurio Annes (28), Ulster's Castle's Tavern (29), Dublin The Village (30), Cork the Lobby Bar (31), Camerhan The Riverside (1 June), Bristol Louisa (2), Nottingham Rescue Rooms (3), Birmingham Papper & Papper (4), London Karamchee at The Spot with Solvete (5), Southampton Jones Jones (6) and Brighton The Freebirt (8), 01922 406183, www.chunkyrecords.com

BORAH BERGMAN/O.L. COXHILL/ PAUL HERMAN

Visiting New York pianist in a trio with the legendary soprano saxophonist and soft drummer Leeds Galaxies Mill, 7 June, £10 in advance only, 0113 243 1569, infoRedrum.com

BLACK FIRE ON WHITE FIRE

Music and mixed media performance by composer Daniel Bro who integrates the mystical meaning of the Hebrew alphabet. London Blue Elephant Theatre, 3-4 June, 8pm, £7/£5, 020 7701 0110, www.scorpio.com

JOHN CALE

Solo tour to promote his new album. Dublin Vicar St (20 June), Milton Keynes Stables (21), Glasgow King Ties (23), Birmingham Glee Club (24), Manchester University (26), Glastonbury Festival (28)

VINICIUS CANTUARIA

Brazilian Afro London collaborator and her group present their latest take on nueva bossa nova. London Queen Elizabeth Hall (16), Leeds The Woodbine (17), Bristol St George's (18), Belfast Crescent Arts Centre (19), Birmingham CBUSO Centre (20) and Oxford St Remains Church (21). A CMN Tour supported by The Wire. www.cmntours.org.uk

CAT POWER

Intropective singer-songwriter Chae Marshall and her group. Aberdeen Lemon Tree

(17 June), Glasgow Mono (18) and London The Union Chapel (20)

CHRIS CHUTTER/FRED FRITH

Rare improvised drums and guitar performance from the longstanding duo of ex-Henry Cw members. Oxford The Zodiac, 7 June 2003, 7:30pm, £10/£5, www.cwevents.org

CINEMATIC ORCHESTRA

Josai Swinerton's multi-jazz collective perform a live soundtrack to Daphne Verbe's 1929 silent film *Man With A Movie Camera*. Liverpool Galt (27 May), Kendal Brewery (28), Derby Assembly Rooms (29), Coventry Warwick Arts Centre (30), Manchester Bridgewater Hall (5 June), Brighton The Dome (6), Brighton Easton Castle Big Chill (2 August), www.brighton.net

CORRA KILLER

Anarchic duo and CHR-affiliated duo take to the London stage. Plus DJs Bo Trace and Jim Beckhaus playing a thoroughly wholesome mix of Rocktron, electronics and music from the future. Kettlewell at London Buffalo Bar, 20 June 3pm-2am, www.kettlewell.co.uk

HUON-HUUR-TU

A multi-jazz band for the Asian folk troupe. Glastonbury Festival (3), London Queen Elizabeth Hall (14)

THE KAMKARS

Brave, timbrally rich arrangements of Kurdish and Persian music from the Iranian Kurdistan family. London Queen Elizabeth Hall, 1 June, 7:30 pm, £10-£25, 020 7950 4203, www.elford.org.uk

LONDON IMPROVISERS ORCHESTRA

Monthly conducted improvisation session from this membership-involving big band. London Rad Rose, 1 June, 8pm, £5/£3, 020 7263 7265

MANITOBA

Lead electronic artist Manitoba aka Toronto musician/producer Don Smith with live group featuring two drummers plus glockenspiel, guitar, theremins and vocals. Dublin's The Jimmy Cake out the warming up. London ICA, 6 June, 8pm

£8/£8, 020 7930 3647, www.ica.org.uk

FRANCIS MCKEE + BRIGGET STORM + CAROLINE MARTIN

Former Vaselines frontperson plus breeding peach-folk from Storm and lo-fi Country from Peil favourite Martin. London The Arts Cafe, 7 June, 8pm, £4, 020 7247 5681, www.rarepresents.co.uk

NINA NASTASIA + CAROLINE MARTIN

Steve Allen-inspired, Hollywood-bait, alt Country artist plus support. London Puzell Room, 18 June, 7:30pm, £11, 020 7960 4203, www.elford.org.uk

TERRY RILEY

World premiere live performance of the 60s minimalist classic *A Rainbow in Curved Air*. A two hour version of modern keyboards and other instruments by members of London's Alternative Media Project. London St Dymphna's Church, 28 June, 7:30pm, £5, 020 8881 1211, 3rdmillenniumweb.co.uk

SCRATCH PERVERTS

Seductive and formidable Tony Vegas, Plus Dale and Perry Onns on tour. Manchester Dome (7 June), Bristol Blowup (14), Cambridge Queens College (17), Cambridge Corpus Christi College (20) and Glastonbury (29), www.scratchpresents.com

RYUICHI KAKAMOTO

Refined takes on bossa nova from the urban singer and composer, with Joaze Marenbaum, Paula Marenbaum, Luiz Brasi and Marcelo Costa. London Union Chapel, 24-25 June, 0671 220 1262

DEREK SHIEL

A day of performances to accompany the ongoing exhibition of Shiel's sound sculptures featuring Brian Auger, Russell Secares, Trevor Taylor and Roberto Fikatos. Oldham Gallery Orchard, 3 May-5 July (exhibition), 28 June (performance), 11am & 7:30pm, 0161 911 4662

ULRICH SCHNAUSS

Young German minimal electronic artist tours the

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Saturday 9-4:30pm

Documentary magazine

HEAR AND NOW

Saturday 10:45pm-1am. New Music magazine

MIXING IT

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Hyper-edited mix of avant sounds

Links to Net radio broadcasts can be found on The Wire Website www.thewire.co.uk

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JUICE 107.2 FM (BRIGHTON)

TOTALLY WIRED

Sunday 10pm-midnight. Leftfield new music

KISS 100 FM (LONDON)

PATRICK FORGE

Sunday 10pm-midnight. Eclectic jazz-rock-jazz mix

FROST AND HYPE

Sunday 3-5am. Jungle

4 HERO

Monday 2-4am. Jazz, Jungle, cyber-soul, breakbeats

MATT JAM LAMONT

Wednesday 2-4am. More breakbeat sounds

LONDON LIVE 94.9 FM

CHARLIE GILLET

Sunday 8-10pm. World Music, roots and R&B

RANKIN' MISS P. RIDDIMS & BLUES

Saturday 10pm-midnight. Slinky rags

RESONANCE 104.4 FM (LONDON)

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XFM 104 FM (LONDON)

LO-MOTION

Sunday 10pm-1am. Leftfield electronics

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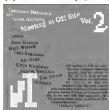
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Dead rock: Tim Buckley

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As the son of a well-kent father myself, you'll understand that I was viscerally and unshakably sworn never to use such a drably oedipal slight. Biology and heredity, damn! You are what you make yourself. Things change, thought, and biology is patent for revenge. Suddenly, one morning, it turns out they were right after all. It's your father in the shaving mirror. They knew him and they know you as well. Even so, I had vowed never to utter those words.

You'll forgive the confessional digression, but the second Mrs Morton was a lady called Sally Smirnoff. I loved her dearly and she brought me out of myself. She was with me one night at the Forum in North London, tucked away snug in an inside pocket. The young guy onstage was already the darling of the music press and there was, as they say, a lot of love in the house that night. The voice was big and theatrical, the way Robert Plant might have sounded if Bob had grown up in some Irish enclave in the Midwest. The songs teetered on the verge of overripe. It was getting that way myself and halfway through the set, with Sally's fulsome encouragement, I took it on myself to tell my neighbour, "I saw his father, you know. He was amazing."

Jeff Buckley's bizarre death in the early summer of 1997, by drowning in the Mississippi, propelled him to instant legend. It also looked as though the Waters of Cronos had claimed him. 22 years earlier his birth father had died younger still, having mistaken heroin for coke. (An easy kind of mistake. I used to mix up vodka and a refreshing glass of water.) The irony didn't go unnoticed. Since everyone knew that Tim Buckley had played no part whatsoever in raising his son,

some grain principle of heredity seemed to be at work.

We went through the same kind of thing trying to hear echoes of Dewey Redman's eldritch saxophone wail in his boy's work, even though knowing that young Joshua never lay in his cradle listening to the old man practise scales next door. In the same way, there ought to have been no audible connection between the Buckley men and much of the commentary tried to point up the difference between Jeff's fruity, almost operatic style and Tim's skittering, multi-scale improvisations.

Even before I saw him in London and Paris towards the end of his life, I'd always thought of Tim Buckley as primarily a jazz musician, in fact only nominally and accidentally a singer at all. Almost the first image I saw of him was a street photograph of Tim on a snowy sidewalk, hands dug deep into a pea-jacket, pipecleaner legs twisting against the cold. On the wall behind him, a poster advertising successive gigs by the John Coltrane quartet and an Ornette Coleman group that night, now that I think of it, have featured Dewey Redman.

That kind of lineage didn't square with the Tim Buckley who'd come through in the business on the say-so of the Mothers' manager Herb Cohen, singing a band of psychedelic folk. That was the Buckley who made his UK debut, in 1968, accompanied by guitarist Lee Underwood, vibist David Friedman and the hastily recruited Danny Thompson on bass. That was the gig preserved on *Dream Letter: Live in London*, still the most elegantly mistimed bootleg ever. On it, Buckley is still unmistakably a folkie, but Underwood's subtle chords, Danny's sinuous lines, and his own chiming 12-string, point the music in a very different direction.

Two years later, stuff like "Buzsai Fly" and "Hi Lily Hi Lo", in fact the whole idea of songs with words, had been set aside in favour of a spooky experimentalism. In his lifetime, Buckley didn't threaten the charts at all. The second album, *Happy Sad* (1969), clambered onto the bottom rungs of the Top 200. Three years later, even devoted fans were scratching their heads at Lorca's bizarre vocalese. The industry saw it as fragment and ultimately suicidal uncommercialism. Others cited Norman Mailer's portentous ambition to

"capture the Prince of Truth in the act of changing a style". Later, others still pointed to the supposed example of Miles Davis, missing the point twice over: Miles's ambitions were hardly uncommercial and anyone with ears could surely hear that he didn't change half as much as he like us to think.

Right from the start, Buckley was an improviser. On that extraordinary London set he yodels nervously between songs, running variations that couldn't be fitted into a format that was already far too constraining for him. When I saw him five years later, the parallel with Coltrane made more sense than ever, except that Tim Buckley physically couldn't take the horn out of his mouth. He'd long since turned himself into an instrument of troubled grace. I saw him twice in a period of days. I think this was the trip when he recorded Fred Neil's "Dolphine" on a session for BBC TV's *The Old Grey Whistle Test*. It's still the only Buckley performance most people know. By that time, the voice had lost some of its purity at the top end but was still too young and too undamaged by excess to have acquired much gravel and gravitas at the bottom. He was still doing his most intriguing stuff between the songs, tuning and retuning that amazing voice, fugging on ideas so fleeting and evanescent that they didn't seem to be part of any identifiable "material" but moments in an ongoing process of self-discovery. The MCS apparently based their falsetto sound on John Coltrane's quartet. I suspect Tim posed himself in front of that poster in deliberate homage. Like Trane he was hearing different harmonies, and like Ornette he had a profound belief in his own unschooled philosophy.

The rock business is understandably nervous of improvisers. Even with the impetus generated by 1994's *Grace*, Jeff Buckley would never have been allowed to free-associate and improvise the way his father did for pretty much the last five years of his career. Even though Jeff's body of work was tragically foreshortened, I remember pretty much all the songs he did that night twenty-something years later. I just don't remember much music between them. That was and is the difference. □

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